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DEFENCE

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OF

Dr. PRICE,

AND THE

REFORMERS of ENGLAND.

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Chairman of the late Committee of Association of the County of York.

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MDCCXCII.

A

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Dr. PRICE, &c.

HAVING lately employed myſelf in forming a collection of Political Papers, chiefly reſpecting the attempt by ſeveral of our Counties, principal Cities and Towns, to correct the Corruption and reſtore the Freedom and Independence of Parliament, from near the end of the year 1779, to the middle of the year 1785, I have been unavoidably led by the nature of my taſk to peruſe the greateſt part of the papers which were publiſhed by Popular Meetings, in different parts of the kingdom, during that period. After this review of their Proceedings, I think it may be aſſerted with truth, that the general conduct of theſe Aſſemblies of the Collective Body and the Committees appointed by

them, was unexceptionably prudent and manly; that their language was firm but decent, becoming FREEMEN alarmed by the misfortunes of an ill-fated and expenſive War, and juſtly offended by the ſervility and corruption of their Repreſentatives; that their meaſures were ſincerely deſigned to promote the Public good, ſupported with vigour and perſevering zeal, yet with a conſtant adherence to order and legality, and finally ſucceſsful to terminate thoſe fatal hoſtilities, and introduce a more faithful and oeconomical expenditure of the Public Money. But the Aſſociations had been convinced at an early period that ſomewhat more than Peace, and a retrenchment of the public expenditure was neceſſary for the ſafety of the Country. They had ſeen, that the Corruption of Parliament and the continuation of the Civil War with America were juſtly to be imputed to thoſe groſs abuſes in the frame and duration of Parliament, which had chiefly originated in the preſent century; and that unleſs an effectual redreſs of thoſe grievances could be obtained, the evils of a corrupt Adminiſtration might ſoon be experienced again, to the utter ruin of the nation. Againſt theſe abuſes therefore the efforts of the Popular Meetings were principally directed, but without ſucceſs, although in effect they aimed at not much more than the Reſtoration of the Conſtitution as it had ſtood ſoon after the æra of the Revolution. For ſince that period, from the great extenſion of our commerce and diſtant territorial

torial poſſeſſions, and the conſequent augmentation of our naval and military eſtabliſhments, from the continual accumulation of taxes, and the proportional increaſe of thoſe perſons by whom they are collected, the Crown has gradually been enabled to influence or command Elections in many ſea-ports and other places, while within the ſame period, in ſtill more Boroughs the Ariſtocracy by various unwarrantable arts, eſpecially by creating fraudulent and fictitious votes, has deſtroyed the Right of Election, and acquired the abſolute power of nomination. To obtain the Repeal of the Septennial Act, and a juſt Redreſs of theſe uſurpations in the Boroughs, were the ultimate objects of the Popular purſuit; but the laſt of theſe neceſſary meaſures the Aſſociations did not endeavour to effect on the extenſive principle of univerſal ſuffrage; but in a more temperate mode, in which a ſubſtantial improvement of the Conſtitution might have been ſafely and peacefully accompliſhed. And in the whole progreſs of this enterpriſe of the People to correct great and dangerous abuſes, I believe not one inſtance can be produced of diſloyalty to the Prince on the Throne, or diſaffection to the Conſtitution, which is diſcoverable in any expreſſion by any one public Meeting; hardly, perhaps, by any individual Member of the Aſſociated Bodies.

In theſe meaſures the Proteſtant Diſſenters concurred, with equal temper and moderation, and with ſignal unanimity throughout the kingdom.

with

But if any man ſhould entertain a ſuſpicion, that under this cloak of moderation they covered ſiniſter deſigns at that time, it is but impartial juſtice to ſtate, that the ſuſpicion muſt be ill-founded, that it is contradicted by facts which prove their attachment to the true Principles of the Conſtitution, at that ſeaſon of great and general diſcontent; when any latent diſloyalty to the Prince, any ſecret wiſh to change the general frame of our Government, would have been diſcloſed by the heat and effervescence of the times. The reverſe of theſe diſpoſitions then was theirs; in every meeting, of which the Diſſenters compoſed a majority, or any conſiderable part, it may be remarked with truth, that the language of their Petitions, and of their Plans of Aſſociation, ſtrongly expreſſed their adherence to the Principles of our mixed Government, by King, Lords, and Commons. I ſhall particularly point out the Petition of the County of Cambridge in 1780, that of the County of Kent in 1782, and the Forms of Aſſociation adopted about that time by the towns of Cambridge and Nottingham, as containing evident proofs of this aſſertion.*

Theſe circumſtances appear ſufficiently to exculpate the Diſſenters from the charge of diſaffection at that juncture; and ſince the preſervation of our Conſtitutional Liberties, and of the Brunſwick Family on the Throne, may be juſtly aſcribed

* For theſe Papers, ſee the Appendix.

aſcribed in a great meaſure to their zeal and attachment, often manifeſted in times of public diſtreſs and danger; any charge of diſaffection on that reſpectable body of men, now when public affairs are conducted with proſperity and with attention to the intereſts and opinions of the community, muſt appear highly improbable; and if not eſtabliſhed by very clear and deciſive proofs, ought to be rejected as a groundleſs and incredible accuſation.

And yet this injurious imputation, which on the late motion for a repeal of the Teſt Laws was urged againſt the Diſſenters with uncommon vehemence, ſeems to have been lightly admitted as a charge indiſputably proved, though unſupported by any more ſolid ground of conviction, than vague ſurmiſe and perſonal invective. By the Teſt Laws, the Diſſenters are ignominiouſly marked as men unfit to be truſted with any honourable or advantageous office, or a ſhare even in the Government of a Corporate Town: they are forbidden to indulge the wiſh, which every good Citizen muſt naturally feel, to ſerve his Country in any civil or military poſt for which his attainments fit him; their capacities for public employment are doomed to lie uncultivated and uſeleſs; the avenues of honeſt ambition are barred againſt them, and the conditions on which alone they can be opened are more degrading than the excluſion itſelf. Under this long proſcription, the pati-

ence of the Diſſenters was not wearied out; their affection to the Government, which, in this reſpect had treated them harſhly, was not alienated. For fifty years they acquieſced in ſilence under the diſgrace and diſabilities of the Teſt Laws. At laſt, obſerving the more liberal ſpirit of this age, and the tolerant diſpoſition which had been diſplayed by Parliament in their recent conceſſions to the Roman Catholics, and to their own Miniſters, they were encouraged to renew their humble requeſts, that the Teſt Laws might be repealed. But when their complaints were heard once more, they were not couched in ſullen or reproachful language; they were expreſſed with a reſpectful deference to Parliament, yet with that decent firmneſs which freedom and conſcious integrity will always inſpire. Nothing prior or ſubſequent to their defeat has indicated a ſpirit of mutinous diſaffection, or diſobedience to the laws. After repeated denials of that equality of Civil Rights, to which every unoffending Citizen has a juſt claim, they have ceaſed to importune Parliament; they have retired from the Bar of the Legiſlature with the dignity of injured but patient men, who have learned to bear legal ignominy without dejection or unſeemly irritation; who have reſolved to await the ſlow Revolution of Public Opinion, and relying on the rectitude of their cauſe, and the increaſing influence of reaſon alone, ſtill truſt that their countrymen will

will at laſt grant them that juſtice which they have hitherto refuſed.

Againſt ſuch men requeſting to ſhare the Common Rights of Citizens, the ordinary pleas of Intolerance would have been addreſſed with little effect to the candour and liberality of Parliament; their eager oppoſers would have attempted in vain to give to their unjuſt policy the colour of political expediency; in vain they would have endeavoured to alarm the Friends of our limited Monarchy, by renewing the hackneyed objections, that Diſſenters, deeming Epiſcopacy unwarrantable by Scripture, muſt be enemies to the Inſtitution of Biſhops, muſt wiſh the Abolition of an Order of Men who form an important part of the Legiſlature; whoſe right of voting with the Peers could not be taken away without expoſing the Crown to Democratic Invaſion.

The ſuggeſtion is unſupported by any collateral circumſtances, or any apparent likelihood of danger; it probably would have made little impreſſion on Parliament, and it ſurely could have been applied with little proſpect of ſucceſs to thoſe Senators, whoſe opinions juſtly bear the the greateſt weight in that aſſembly.—For it muſt have been inſtantly felt, that to wiſh ſome important changes in the form of Government is not inconſiſtent with the true idea of allegiance; that rational and good Men might deem the Cinque Port Barons an objectionable part

of the Houſe of Commons, or the tranſlation of Biſhops a defect in the Houſe of Peers; that it even might be their opinion, that the entire excluſion of that Order from the Houſe of Peers would be neither injurious to Religion, nor diſadvantageous to the political intereſt of the Community; and yet ſuch Men might be truly good Citizens, might cordially approve our Government by King, Lords, and Commons, might upon the whole be well ſatisfied with that ſhare of happineſs which may be enjoyed under our Conſtitution; might have no deſign, no wiſh to diſturb the tranquillity of the public; on the contrary, conceiving our Government to be inveſted with a lawful and beneficial authority, they might chearfully ſubmit to it in a private ſtation, and be willing, in a public capacity, to ſupport it with fidelity and active zeal.

Theſe are the diſpoſitions which, in a larger view than that of ſtrict law, conſtitute a good Citizen; and, where theſe diſpoſitions are evident, it is a matter of no concern to the State, to ſcrutinize thought, or to paſs a judicial ſentence on private opinion, and harmleſs if not uſeful ſpeculation. If Men of theſe diſpoſitions ſhould not be thought to bear that dutiful attachment to the State, which our laws require, if allegiance ſhould be conſtrued to imply an acceptance of the Conſtitution and all its eſtabliſhments, as perfect models of political wiſdom, and abſolutely incapable of any emendation;

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allegiance would be incompatible with common ſenſe and obſervation. Such an idea of allegiance is manifeſtly indefenſible—contending parties muſt have agreed to renounce it.

In all probability, therefore, the application for a repeal of the Teſt Laws would have been admitted by the united wiſdom and juſtice of the Houſe, if more powerful means had not been found to rouze the jealous ſpirit of State Policy; and to ſuppreſs, in minds of the greateſt benignity and wiſdom of the pureſt piety and virtue, their better principles of TOLERATION.

Some Diſſenting Miniſters of much ability and reputation had hazarded, with an honeſt zeal, to publiſh their opinions on the inutility and impropriety of any religious eſtabliſhment; had expreſſed a deteſtation of the corruptions of Parliament, and an admiration of certain Republican forms of Government. Theſe hardy ſentiments were detailed to the Houſe in quotations from the Authors alluded to; and their Adverſary, whoſe declamatory talents, for ſome years, had been little attended to, had once more the ſatisfaction to find that the Houſe liſtened to him, and that his perſonal invectives had made that impreſſion which he wiſhed, and which his reaſoning muſt have failed to produce. A majority of the Members were ſhocked by theſe freedoms of ſpeculative Men, they were appalled by the magnified dangers of INNOVATION; one common ſentiment of fear pervaded their breaſts,

breaſts, ſtifled their accuſtomed feelings of equity and benevolence, and determined them ſtill to prolong the reſtraint of thoſe partial laws, by which our Diſſenting Brethren are held in a ſtate of diſgraceful inferiority; "Thou art not Cæſar's friend if thou let theſe Men go free."

But if the Diſſenting Miniſters, who were reprobated on this occaſion with ſo much ſeverity, had really been as bad Citizens, as turbulent and ſeditious Men, as their accuſer wiſhed to repreſent them, how could it conſiſt with juſtice for the faults of two or three Individual Diſſenters to puniſh thouſands of that denomination, not only without evidence of their diſloyalty, but even againſt their ſolemn proteſtations of attachment to the Conſtitution, before the accuſation was heard or ſuſpected; and againſt the ſtronger proof reſulting from the uniform and collective loyalty of the Diſſenters for the preceding century. If the General Body of Diſſenters in the preſent age ſhould be acquitted of diſloyalty, and yet their puniſhment as diſloyal Men ſhould be thought neceſſary, becauſe the influence of the Miniſters alluded to may too probably taint the Diſſenters of the next generation with their obnoxious principles, it is impoſſible to foreſee, to what intolerable oppreſſion this ſtrange principle may not lead the Legiſlature. Juſtice ought to be to States as well as to Individuals, the unchangeable rule of their morality; to inflict hardſhips on particular claſſes

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of Men, who have actually done nothing to merit them, is a palpable breach of that rule, which the bare poſſibility of danger from thoſe Men cannot juſtify. But to treat Men of this age with hardſhip, on a precarious ſpeculation, that dangers may ariſe from other Men of the ſame ſect in ſome future generation, is to combine the utmoſt injuſtice with the moſt manifeſt impolicy.

Obſervations like theſe were ably, though ineffectually, urged in favour of the Diſſenters, by their magnanimous Advocate on the late motion for the Repeal of the Teſt-Act. But the powerful reaſoning urged on that occaſion might have received perhaps ſome additional force, had it been inquired whether the allegations againſt the accuſed individuals afford any ſubſtantial ground even for their conviction as bad Citizens, on whom the diſabilities of the Teſt Laws might be inflicted, or continued with juſtice. That this queſtion may be diſcuſſed with brevity, I ſhall confine myſelf to the conſideration of the ſingle caſe of Dr. Price, whoſe talents and virtues juſtly placed him at the head of the Diſſenters; but whoſe character, mild and amiable as it was, could not protect him from the rage of their Accuſer, who inſulted his feelings with inſolent cenſure or more inſolent commendation; who exhauſted all the arts of his falſe and fraudulent eloquence to render this excellent Man at once odious and deſpicable; aiming in

in his ſuppoſed criminality to involve the whole Body of the Diſſenters, and ultimately to diſcredit the cauſe of Political Reformation, and the men by whom that cauſe had been promoted.

It has been alleged, and a deep impreſſion has been made by the allegation, that more dangerous principles of non-conformity have been introduced or revived by Dr. Price, than thoſe which had been the uſual grounds of ſeparation aſſigned by his predeceſſors: That his diſſent was not merely a diſlike of Biſhops or of the Clerical Veſtments; a diſapprobation of our Liturgy and our Articles of Religion; or a conviction that the impoſition of human forms of faith and worſhip is inconſiſtent with the liberty of Chriſtians and the divine authority of the Goſpel: That Dr. Price was an adverſary to every poſſible inſtitution of a National Church: That he aimed to ſubvert the preſent, without eſtabliſhing another form of public Religion in its place: That he would diſband the National Clergy, aboliſh every emolument provided for them by the State, and abandon the ſupport of Religion to the voluntary zeal of Men willing, on ſuch terms, to teach or to be taught: That the able Men who concur with him in theſe ſentiments, would too probably ſucceed in diffuſing them through the whole Body of the Diſſenters; and that the tendency and final iſſue of theſe principles was nothing leſs than the introduction of anarchy

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and confuſion, the triumph of fanaticiſm and the ruin of learning and rational religion.

To this it may be replied, that it is the intereſt of the Community that a free examination of every Inſtitution ſhould be permitted, and even encouraged; and, conſequently, that ſpeculative Men, who may be led in the courſe of their diſquiſitions to condemn any Public Eſtabliſhment, either in part or in whole, ought not to be puniſhed by diſgrace or any other penalty whatever.

Eſtabliſhments, which in one age may have been uſeful or neceſſary, in another may have become uſeleſs, inconvenient, or pernicious; either the beneficial end for which they were ordained may be more eaſily attainable without them; or fraud and corruption may have perverted them from their original deſign to ſerve an unworthy purpoſe; and then benefit to a few individuals may be produced, but the Community will be injured. And this is not uncommonly the end, whatever may have been the deſign of all human inſtitutions. Government itſelf, which is formed for the general benefit, is apt to degenerate into tyranny; the Magiſtrate is intruſted with much power, he grows fond of it, and wiſhes to uſurp more; or, perhaps, he exerciſes the power he has, not for the common good, but his own ſeparate advantage; in either of theſe caſes, it is a work of difficulty and of danger too to controul the Ma-

giſtrate; and therefore his ambition and his injuſtice too frequently ſucceed. And when Men are embodied in any ſubordinate capacity, they are then apt to be influenced by a Corporation Spirit, which tempts them to prefer the partial intereſts of that claſs or profeſſion to which they belong, to the general welfare of their Country. At firſt the eſtabliſhment may have been benevolently and wiſely planned, and the Public for ſome time may have reaped advantage from the faithful Adminiſtration of its Officers; after that, the primitive zeal is obſerved to cool; the performance of profeſſional duty becomes irkſome, it is gradually relaxed, neglected, and at length wholly abandoned; and yet the emoluments originally annexed to the actual diſcharge of duty, will frequently be retained, and even increaſed to the higheſt amount, when little or no profeſſional duty has been performed. Such is the tendency of human ſelfiſhneſs, under the ſpecious pretext of zeal for the profeſſion; and ſuch the progreſs of every inſtitution to a ſtate of extreme abuſe, when exempt from controul, and unſubjected to free examination.

It muſt be admitted, however, that partial evil may ſometimes be the conſequence of popular controul or free diſcuſſion. The juſt and patriotic Magiſtrate may be the object of groundleſs jealouſy and diſtruſt; and his power may be reduced within limits too narrow to permit him

him to effect the good he wiſhes. But this is an evil comparatively of little moment. For it is eaſy to enlarge his power, when experience has ſhewn it to be expedient, or to adopt his plans, when diſcuſſion has proved their utility. But when the power of popular controul is loſt, there are no regular or pacific means left by which the corruptions and oppreſſions of Government can be checked; the Community then lies proſtrate at the feet of Abſolute Power; and it will not be long before Abſolute Power will have manifeſted its tiger diſpoſition, and devoured its prey.

Unreaſonable prejudice too may attack the moſt uſeful Inſtitutions of a ſubordinate kind. It may demand the reformation of abuſes where none exiſt; or it may attempt to aboliſh what ought to be only reformed. But here alſo, the evils reſulting from the abuſe of free diſcuſſion are evidently inconſiderable, and far out-weighed by the ſuperior advantages of intellectual liberty. There is indeed, in all controverſy, ſomewhat unpleaſant to our feelings; we are apt to be indolent; we are apt to be faſtidious; if the ſubject in debate be trivial and unintereſting, the arguments of the diſputer are thrown away, and his wit itſelf ſoon grown tireſome. If it be an important ſubject, we have already perhaps formed our ſentiments upon it; we diſlike the trouble to review them, and complain that our repoſe and acquieſcence in preconceived opinion

have been diſturbed: Men of mild and amiable diſpoſitions are apt to overlook the advantages of diſcuſſion, and to lament the heats which are often excited among diſputants, and their frequent breaches of candour and charity; while Men of miſtaken humility exaggerate the weakneſs and imperfection of human reaſon, and bewildered in the mazes of controverſy, know not where to turn, or what opinion to adopt, but that diſcuſſion is to be ſhunned as alike to them fruitleſs and unſatisfactory. But we are not to reject profitable toil, becauſe it is not always attended with pleaſure, for that would be extremely unreaſonable; nor are we, with miſtaken humility, to doom human underſtanding to ruſt in perpetual inactivity, for that would be a miſchievous and impracticable attempt to thwart the deſigns of Providence, and ſtop the improvement of Mankind. Our intellectual faculty, imperfect as it is, was given by God to Man, to be freely exerciſed, and to be alike the means of happineſs to Individuals and to Communities: to ſuppreſs or obſtruct the free operation of this inſtrument of our felicity muſt be in a greater or a leſs degree diſadvantageous; it muſt have a tendency more or leſs direct to perpetuate whatever is falſe in human opinion, by preventing confutation; and to conſecrate whatever is uſeleſs or pernicious in human inſtitutions, by teaching us to think of the Works of Man,

Man, as we ought to think of the Works of God alone, that whatever is—is right.

It is true, that in the controverſies of ſpeculative Men, and in the ſtruggles of contending parties, the general opinion is not unfrequently erroneous for ſome time; becauſe Mankind are liable to be miſled by the miſtatement of facts, and apt to accept eloquent declamation inſtead of ſolid and concluſive reaſoning. But it is unqueſtionable, that what is true or beneficial, may be more eaſily proved to be what it really is, than what is falſe or pernicious, can be proved to be what it really is not. By this ſingle circumſtance, a deciſive advantage in all polemical ſtruggles is for ever fixed on the ſide of truth and general utility; and hence, under a juſt freedom of diſcuſſion, that Cauſe which involves the intereſt of the Community will be ultimately ſucceſsful. Sometimes the Adverſary of that Cauſe may combat with a tranſient ſuperiority; he may poſſeſs unuſual powers of reaſoning; he may cover his fallacies with uncommon art and eloquence; but his triumph will be of ſhort duration, and the miſchief done will be of little extent. Genius, equally vigorous, will ſoon ariſe to point out and correct his errors; equal powers of eloquence and reaſon will be exerted to recommend the truth, but with a ſucceſs more extenſive and more laſting.—The Public Mind, having viewed the ſubject on every ſide, having ſeen every fallacy detected, every

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ſolid argument unanſwerably maintained, will yield at laſt to full conviction; and the conſequence of the controverſy will be, the advancement of Human Knowledge, and the augmented happineſs of the Community.

To what can we aſcribe the gradual improvement of theſe civilized European Countries from a ſtate of ſavage barbariſm, but to the efforts of Reaſon; of Reaſon often exerted againſt the intereſts of an injurious Government in oppoſition to groſs and prevailing prejudice, and in defiance of the ſanguinary ſtatutes of an ignorant and intolerant age? How truly inſignificant then are all the partial evils which have ariſen from free examination and popular controul, when compared with the mighty benefits which have been obtained by theſe means, under circumſtances very diſcouraging and very diſadvantageous to the exertions of Reaſon and Public Spirit! And how greatly more might the condition of mankind be yet improved, in every art, in every virtue which can accommodate or adorn human life, if juſt reſtraints on the ambition of Government were generally impoſed, if the free exerciſe of Reaſon were permitted, and diſgrace were annexed by the laws to crimes alone.

But of all human eſtabliſhments, thoſe which have been formed for the promotion of Religion are perhaps the moſt liable to great and dangerous abuſe. Reſpecting theſe inſtitutions the freedom

freedom of ſpeculative men ought, leaſt of all to be confined. From the reverence which is juſtly paid to the ſacred doctrines of Religion, the Prieſthood in all Countries have uſually acquired a great degree of influence over the National mind; and the hiſtory of Europe in the darker and leſs inquiſitive ages ſhows, that this influence has been employed to aggrandize the ſacerdotal order, to ſuppreſs free inquiry, to encourage ſuperſtition, and to perpetuate, if that had been poſſible, the credulity and blind ſubmiſſion of the People by whom the Clergy had been unwiſely elevated to exceſſive wealth and grandeur. After the revival of letters in the fifteenth Century, and the conſequent diffuſion of uſeful knowledge, a conſiderable Reformation of Eccleſiaſtical abuſes was ſoon effected; the doctrines of Chriſtianity were explained in a manner more conſonant with common ſenſe, and the riches of the Clergy were reduced within more moderate bounds in England, and in many other parts of Europe. Whether that Reformation of the eſtabliſhed Church in England was carried at firſt as far as it ever ought to be carried; whether the doctrines and the forms of Public worſhip in our Church are unexceptionable; whether the power and wealth of our Clergy are conducive to the advancement of piety, or the benefit of the Community; whether the ends of Religion may not now, or at ſome future period, be more completely obtained, through the diligence of

Miniſters

Miniſters depending on the voluntary contributions of their reſpective Congregations, than under the Miniſtry of an equally learned but leſs active Clergy for whom the laws have provided an income independent of their Pariſhioners; theſe are queſtions on which ſpeculative men ſhould be allowed to differ, and to give a negative to each, without reproach. For it is important to the Community, that on theſe ſubjects it ſhould form a juſt and well conſidered judgement, not an opinion taken up without examination, on the authority of the Prieſt, or the Magiſtrate; becauſe they may have an intereſt to ſupport abuſes, but the Community cannot.

Theſe are at all times proper ſubjects of diſcuſſion; and if in each caſe, the queſtion ſhould be decided by unbiaſſed Reaſon, the honour of Religion, and the welfare of the Public, would not be ſacrificed as they often have been to gratify the wiſhes of the ſuperior Clergy; the correction of abuſes, the more ſucceſsful promotion of piety, juſtice, and benevolence would then become the primary objects of attention; and the caſe and accommodation of Miniſters in the Houſe of Peers would be deemed ſubordinate conſiderations.

But when the examination of ſuch queſtions is prevented by the State, or which is nearly equivalent, when diſſent is puniſhed in the ſanguinary mode of corporal ſeverities, or diſcouraged

couraged by legal diſgrace and the privation of Civil Rights, the natural conſequence of this policy muſt be a conſtant accumulation of abuſes in the Church, inſtead of progreſſive improvement; and the ſtrong and increaſing diſapprobation of ſerious men, inſtead of that general conformity which a more liberal policy would gradually produce.

But it may be objected, that the principles of toleration here laid down are too extenſive to be valid; that they hold out impunity to men of all religions and of *none;* that to tolerate unbelievers of every claſs is to encourage irreligion; and that the conſequence of ſuch improvident encouragement of irreligion, in any Community, muſt be the final prevalence of Atheiſm, and the ruin of that ſenſe of Religion by which the crimes of Mankind are chiefly reſtrained and their miſeries conſoled. Theſe objections, perhaps, have been ſufficiently obviated by the general obſervations which have been already ſtated. But ſince pious men, from ſuch invidious ſuggeſtions, may too readily entertain fearful apprehenſions of the event, ſhould the principles of unlimited toleration be adopted; it may not be improper to recall to their recollection theſe unheeded, but important truths; that it is not lawful to uſe force, or any ſpecies of corrupt influence to promote the acceptance of religious truth; that the propagation of Religion by any means, but thoſe of argument and rational con-

viction, is contrary to the whole tenor of the Goſpel, and the practice of our Divine Maſter; that, under the Pagan Governments, ſoon after our Saviour's appearance in the world, popular ſuperſtition and philoſophic incredulity were equally ſubdued by the power of reaſon alone, and Chriſtianity, poor, deſpiſed, and perſecuted, in a ſhort time became the Religion of the civiliſed World: while in Chriſtian Countries and in a ſubſequent age, in which the Public Forms of Religion have not been improved up to the general ſtandard of good ſenſe, and in which the Clergy have become the objects of contempt or envy, for their wealth and power, for their ſecularity, their diſregard of profeſſional duty, and their apparent inutility to the Public, no terrors, no ſeverities of an inquiſition, have been able to prevent the growth of irreligion. Penal ſeverities may compel the unbeliever to ſubmit to the Prieſt's authority: but averſion to a Religion, ſo propagated, will take a ſtill deeper root in his heart; the ſpectator of his ſufferings will ſympathiſe with him, will be tempted to adopt his reſentments, and join in his unbelief. On ſuch occaſions it is a reflection which naturally occurs, that force, or fraud, or corruption, muſt be unneceſſary and improper ſupports of a Religion founded on Divine Authority; and the Church ſyſtem, which cannot ſtand without thoſe props, muſt have been built upon a foundation originally bad, or the ſuperſtructure muſt be in a very

inſecure

inſecure and a very diſgraceful ſtate of dilapidation. From this dilemma, the intolerant Churchman finds it impoſſible to eſcape; but it cannot entangle the more conſiſtent Chriſtian, who reſpects the Rights of Conſcience, and who, relying on the truth and divine efficacy of the Goſpel, will not conſent to diſhonour his Religion, by employing fraud, or by accepting the aid of either compulſion or corruption.

In England, unbelievers are certainly liable to penal ſtatutes of great ſeverity; but the Spirit of the Times is more liberal than the Letter of our Laws; the indulgence of Government, and the concurrence of the Public, have reduced to a ſtate of dormancy many of thoſe intolerant ſtatutes which have not yet been repealed. Even the Teſt Laws, which bear with ſo much hardſhip on Chriſtian Diſſenters of every ſect, are found in practice ſeldom to exclude from civil offices, unbelievers of any denomination. It is notorious, that many of the ſuperior ſtations of truſt and honour are filled by perſons who reject Chriſtianity, and who ſcarcely admit a ſingle article of the Religion of Reaſon. I cannot commend the laxity of their practice, who thus communicate with a National Church, the moſt important doctrines of which they wholly diſbelieve; nor can I praiſe the policy of a Legiſlature, which retains a Teſt eaſily eluded by men of no Religion, and effectual only to exclude thoſe conſcientious Chriſtians who ſcruple to

concur in ſome uneſſential particulars, but embrace the ſubſtantial part of the Public Religion. But while men of capacity, for Public Affairs, are to be found among the various tribes of unbelievers, it is an advantage to the Public, that their defective Creed ſhould be no bar to their employment. In the preſent reign, Hume, Gibbon, Smith, were appointed without ſcruple to reſpectable poſts in various departments of the State; their appointment was honourable to the liberality of our Government, and they ſerved their Country with the approbation of every candid and equitable Chriſtian. But when a Politician can unite in himſelf the diſcordant characters of Bigot and Unbeliever, when he can ſupport by force what he believes to be falſe; when he can inſult the Religion of his Country by profaning its moſt ſacred ceremony in the act of Public Celebration; and yet can exceed the moſt intolerant Churchman, in zeal, to preſerve the ſtatutes of perſecution unrepealed; if power ſhould be intruſted to ſuch a man, it would excite an indignant diſapprobation which no profeſſional abilities could diminiſh. And ſhould he chance to ſit upon one of the higheſt ſeats of Magiſtracy, it would only be more neceſſary, for the ſake of injured Freedom and Religion, to brand him as an Oppreſſor of Men much better than himſelf: He, a gloomy ſcorner of Chriſtianity, who ſupports the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem of ſuperſtition, as he deems it, with

with all the terrors of penal ſeverity; they, conſcientious men, who, in ſome uneſſential articles, diſſent from the Church, but who ſincerely embrace the ſubſtance of that Religion, which their injurious perſecutor wholly rejects.

If then perſons, who diſſent fundamentally from the Religion of the Public, ought not to ſuffer the perſecution either of corporal puniſhment or of legal diſgrace, it is ſurely evident, that perſons who agree with the Church in fundamentals, and differ only in ſome uneſſential circumſtances, ought, with ſtill more reaſon, to be exempt from all diſcouragements, either of greater or of leſs ſeverity. In England, for inſtance, if the queſtions ſhould be debated, whether the Church does not need Reformation, in points which reſpect her diſcipline or doctrine, the diſtribution of her Revenues, or the political power of her Prelates; why ſhould that Citizen incur diſgrace, who reprobates Eccleſiaſtical Sinecures or the tranſlation of Biſhops, and their conſequent ſubjection to the undue influence of the Court, more than he who reſcinded ſinecures in the State, and attempted to eject the Corniſh Burgeſſes, the Cinque Port Barons, from the Houſe of Commons? Or if any one ſhould hazard an opinion, that Piety and every Chriſtian Virtue might be more effectually taught by Miniſters, paid by voluntary contribution, than by a Body of Clergy, entitled by law to tithes and other emoluments, why

ſhould

ſhould he not be allowed freely and without reproach to ſupport his ſpeculations; juſt as another on a different ſubject, of far inferior, but ſtill of great importance, might, without offence, declare his opinion, that a ſtanding army for the defence of this iſland is unneceſſary, and might be exchanged with advantage for a volunteer militia? That the eſtabliſhment of a National Church, in any Country, is abſolutely neceſſary for the ſupport of Religion, is a poſition which cannot be maintained, with any colour of reaſon, becauſe it is contradicted by indiſputable facts, in ancient and in modern times; by the gradual propagation of Chriſtianity for three centuries after the death of Chriſt, without the aid of an eſtabliſhed Clergy,* and by the ſucceſs which now attends the labours of the Diſſenting Miniſters, who, like their Predeceſſors in the primitive ages, devote themſelves to the ſervice of Religion, without a proſpect of legal proviſion. That ſuch Inſtitutions are in their nature unlawful, is another poſition which is equally untenable; becauſe the Jewiſh Religion affords a direct precedent of a National Church eſtabliſhed, as every Chriſtian muſt admit by Divine Authority, becauſe the formation of National Chriſtian Churches is not forbidden by the Goſpel; and becauſe COMMON conſent affords to National Churches, as it does to thoſe which are merely congregational, a ſimilar and a ſufficient ſanction. But when diſſentions

* Perhaps he means an endowed clergy. The diſtinction of clergy & laity was early. See Suicer. Theſ. Eccl. under the words κληρικὸς & λαϊκός. — "Vani erimus, ſi putaverimus, quod ſacerdotibus non liceat, laicis licere. Nonne et laici ſacerdotes ſumus?, ſcrip-

diſſentions have ariſen, in any Country, reſpecting the Religion of the Public, and no aſſent of the People approaching nearly to general approbation can be ſuppoſed, there may then ariſe queſtions of expediency, whether an attempt ought to be made to regain that general approbation which has been loſt, by reforming the Inſtitutions of the Church, or whether the eſtabliſhment itſelf ought not to be wholly laid aſide, and the propagation of Religion to be intruſted to the zeal and aſſiduity of unendowed Teachers.

On this ſubject I am free to acknowledge, that my ſentiments differ widely from thoſe which have been imputed to Dr. Price. The eſtabliſhment of a Parochial Clergy, under the ſuperintendance of Epiſcopal Officers, in the preſent very imperfect ſtate of knowledge and virtue in the World, appears to be of important uſe. In England, though many of the Clergy are ſuffered to hold a pleurality of livings, to be even wholly non-reſident, and the litigious nature of the proviſion, to which the law entitles them, often renders thoſe who do not deſert their Parochial Duty, incapable of doing the good which otherwiſe might be expected from them; yet, under theſe manifeſt diſadvantages, our Parochial Clergy may juſtly be praiſed as a very learned and a very uſeful Body of Men; of whom many, perhaps a majority, are exemplary in the performance of their duty, and ſucceſsful in promoting good morals and a ſerious ſenſe of Religion. Even in the moſt remote and unfrequented parts

tum est, regnum quoque nos et sacerdotes deo et patri suo fecit.*"
Tertullian, de exhortatione castitatis, cap. 7.

* Revelation, i. 6.

parts of the Country, good order, decency, and civility are promoted, in a conſiderable degree, by their example and influence, in the ſmall diſtricts which are committed to their inſtruction. And though grave and able Paſtors, of the Diſſenting Congregations, are ſupported in a reſpectable manner by voluntary ſtipends in many of our rich and populous towns; I know not any facts from whence it may be collected, that the ſmall and thinly peopled pariſhes in the country would be generally ſupplied with a ſet of Miniſters as learned and rational as the preſent, if the eſtabliſhment of any Parochial Clergy were to be aboliſhed.

But though the opinion of Dr. Price, on this ſubject, may have been erroneous, yet it was the error of a ſincere and generous mind. Pious, benevolent, and diſintereſted, he may have thought mankind more generally influenced by an active zeal for Religion, than experience proves them to be: convinced of the Divine Origin of the Goſpel, and its efficacy finally to overcome all oppoſition, he may have valued too lightly the benefits actually derived from our National Clergy, and the much greater advantages which under a reformed Eſtabliſhment would ſoon be the conſequence of their increaſing zeal and aſſiduity: warmed with the contemplation of that ſtate of perfection, to which mankind are uniformly, though ſlowly advancing, in which Piety will be found to flouriſh without

without the aid of the Prieſt, and Juſtice will be ſecurely relied on without the intervention of the Magiſtrate, he may have been too ready to conclude that Eccleſiaſtical Eſtabliſhments, in every form, are uſeleſs at preſent, and ought to be exchanged for the ſimple and original mode of Inſtruction, by voluntary and unendowed Teachers. That we are far diſtant from that ſtate of general knowledge and virtue, in which it would be expedient to adopt this ſcheme, is readily allowed. But ſhall a Man, of great and uſeful talents, of exemplary piety and virtue, be puniſhed with infamy for ſpeculations like theſe, which, inſtead of being derogatory from Religion, manifeſt the firmeſt reliance on its Divine Authority: or forfeit his civil rights for prematurely propoſing ſchemes of Inſtruction, which every good man muſt wiſh we were worthy to receive, and which it is the joint aim of Law and Religion to fit us to adopt? If theſe peculiarities of opinon, which, in fact, have been altogether harmleſs, are yet in a legal conſideration offences againſt the State for which Dr. Price was juſtly puniſhable; what Man of ſerious thought can be deemed innocent, or in what but abject ignorance, or a ſervile compliance with Public Opinion, can ſafety be found? Intolerance has a microſcopic eye, which can diſcover danger or criminality in any ſpeculation on any ſubject. In her view, whether the ſubject of diſquiſition be theological or moral,

whether it relate to metaphyſics or natural philoſophy, freedom of inquiry is always dangerous, and novelty of ſentiment is never free from guilt. On ſuch reaſons, the diſgrace of Price may be approved; and on ſimilar grounds, Clarke and Hoadly, Newton and Locke, Churchmen, who were the ornaments of their profeſſion; Philoſophers, who were the honour of their Country, might have been condemned as Men of dangerous ſpeculation and diſturbers of the Public Peace. And thus the Zealots of Church Power, proceeding ſtep by ſtep from one degree of intolerance to another more ſevere, might juſtify, by parity of reaſon, the impriſonment of Galileo at Rome, the legal murder of Servetus at Geneva, the burning of Proteſtants in London, and the maſſacre of the Hugonots in Paris.

Such were the barbarities which diſgraced our Anceſtors in a ferocious age. Under a ſtate of milder manners, we ſhudder at the mention of them; and the execution of a ſingle Diſſident at Smithfield, would now excite general horror, and prove the ruin of our National Church. But though theſe cruel ſpectacles are ſeen among us no more, our eager Churchmen muſt not flatter themſelves that they have ceaſed to be intolerant. Toleration indeed has long been the maxim of our Civil Government; in the preſent reign, the ſeverer ſtatutes of perſecution have been repealed, or

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their operation, with few exceptions has been ſuſpended; and if zealous Churchmen had teſtified no repugnance to the repeal of the Teſt Laws, it is probable that the conduct of Government, on the late agitation of that queſtion, might have been conformable with their general maxims, and the requeſt of the Diſſenters might have been granted by Parliament. But ſurely little praiſe is due to the tolerant principles of thoſe Churchmen, who applaud indeed the repeal of thoſe ſanguinary ſtatutes, which, from the increaſed humanity of the age, it was found impoſſible to execute, but who obſtinately inſiſt on retaining thoſe leſs rigorous Penal Laws, which, puniſhing opinion by diſgrace and the forfeiture of civil rights alone, may ſtill be allowed to operate to a great extent, with no immediate hazard.

To Louis XIV. it ſeems to have been excluſively reſerved, in an enlightened age, to join the extreme of refinement, with that of intolerant ſeverity. His Capital was the reſidence of ſcience, arts, and learning; his Court was the ſeat of ſplendour, elegance, and every voluptuous enjoyment; but his Cabinet was the cell of an Inquiſitor. Intoxicated with conqueſt and unlimited power, this Deſpot reſolved to endure no Religion in France but his own; he revoked the Edict of Nantes; he ſent Dragoons into every Province to compel his Proteſtant Subjects to embrace his Religion, but diſſatisfied with

their ſucceſs, he ſent other Miſſionaries in this unhallowed work of converſion, to ſeduce and to win them over by bribes. It is difficult to ſay, whether the compulſion employed on this occaſion was more odious and deteſtable, or the corruption was more baſe and deſpicable. But it is too evident, that ſo long as our Teſt Laws ſhall remain unrepealed, the conduct of our Government will bear a near reſemblance to the practice of this ſuperſtitious Tyrant in theſe pecuniary converſions. The mode is ſomewhat different; the principle and the effect intended are the ſame.

Our milder ſyſtem of intolerance indeed diſclaims all corporal ſeverities, but it endeavours corruptly to ſupport the Religion of the State; by annexing honours and the emoluments of civil office, to the profeſſion of orthodox belief. But this ſpecies of undue influence is as impolitic and ineffectual for the end propoſed, as it is unreaſonable and contrary to the purity of the Goſpel; it diſhonours the Public Religion, and yet it does not diminiſh the number of Diſſenters. On the contrary, the Diſſenters have long been a growing Body; and they are now increaſing, perhaps, with greater rapidity than in any former period. There are among them Men of great learning and genius, who, to piety and unblemiſhed morals, add an eagerneſs of zeal againſt the Eſtabliſhed Church; and undoubtedly the preſent increaſe of non-conformity, in a conſiderable

ſiderable meaſure, may be imputed to their unwearied exertions. But this is not a circumſtance peculiar to the preſent age. The Diſſenters have always had among them able and zealous Men, whoſe high reputation gave credit to their cauſe; and whoſe diligence and aſſiduity gained proſelytes not merely among perſons of the inferior ſtations, but in a greater proportion, perhaps, among ſerious men of liberal education, and of opulent or independent fortunes. This, therefore, cannot be deemed a caſual advantage which the Diſſenters of this age poſſeſs, nor can the gradual increaſe of their number, during the laſt century, be accounted for by any accidental or precarious circumſtances; it muſt have ariſen from ſome permanent and powerful cauſe, which, under the preſſure of Penal Statutes and againſt the efforts of a numerous and learned Clergy, has operated with conſtant and increaſing ſucceſs to ſeparate wiſe and good Men from the Eſtabliſhed Church.

It is true, the adherents of the Church of England ſtill form a large majority of the nation; but many nominal Chriſtians and Unbelievers of various ſorts are claſſed among them; and there are many ſincere Chriſtians who have expreſſed, but more, perhaps, who have concealed their diſapprobation of the forms of our Church, and their wiſhes for a farther Reformation, and yet are not convinced that they

they ought to join the Non-Conformiſts.—Theſe conſiderations ſeem clearly to prove, that a mitigated intolerance is ill calculated to promote uniformity of Religion, that our Teſt Laws are unprofitably ſevere, and that we ought to abandon them for their inefficiency, even if duty did not require us to renounce them as diſhonourable to the Goſpel, and oppreſſive to our unoffending Fellow-Citizens. It is ſurely ſufficient, that the inutility of this corrupt ſyſtem of intolerance has been proved by the experience of a century; it is time that more honourable meaſures ſhould be tried, that the maxims of impartial juſtice and equity ſhould more conſiſtently govern the conduct of the State. They are the maxims on which the wealth and tranquillity of nations principally depend; and weighed againſt them, the intereſts and wiſhes of the ſuperior Clergy ought to be deemed as duſt in the balance.

But the too cautious Churchman may here exclaim, that the adoption of theſe ſpecious principles of univerſal toleration would not leſſen, it would rather aggravate the evils of controverſy and diſſention; that the repeal of the Teſt Laws and the removal of every other penal reſtraint, which operates as a fence to the Eſtabliſhment, would open to the Diſſenters a proſpect of ſucceſs, which would augment their number with increaſing rapidity; and ſtill as their number approached more nearly to that

of

of their opponents, thoſe fierce animoſities would be more inflamed, which it ought to be our endeavour to cool and compoſe. And it muſt be acknowledged, that theſe apprehenſions would be by no means groundleſs, if, after having annulled every ſtatute of intolerance, from which the Public Religion has hitherto received a diſgraceful ſupport, the State ſhould ſuffer no Reformation in the Diſcipline, the Revenues, or the Public Forms of our Church. But if the conceſſion of perfect toleration muſt ultimately conduct us to an Eccleſiaſtical Reformation, why ſhould that conſequence impreſs the minds of our Legiſlators with terror, or excite the oppoſition of Stateſmen, who are friendly to Religion, and who feel the noble ambition to improve their Country. With the ſuperſtition of elder times, we have done well to abandon their ſyſtem of ſanguinary perſecution: It was a ſyſtem offenſive to humanity, offenſive to the free ſpirit of our Conſtitution; and the tranquillity which it was calculated to produce was not the acquieſcence of men convinced and ſatisfied, it was the repoſe of ignorance and blind credulity, the the ſubmiſſion of ſlaves, afraid and often unable to think. If the State ſtop at this point of incomplete toleration, willing to diſcontinue corporal ſeverities in ſupport of the Public Religion, but determined to protect the abuſes and imperfections of the Church, by diſqualification for Civil Office, and the infliction of legal diſgrace;

grace; in that caſe, a ſtate of contention, ſtill increaſing in turbulence, ſeems unavoidable.—The degree of perſecution at preſent employed is ſufficient to provoke and exaſperate, it is not ſufficient to intimidate and ſuppreſs the opponents of the Church: By the rigour of a ſterner intolerance the inconveniences and the advantages of non-conformity might have been unknown in England, as they are in Spain and Italy; free inquiry might have been ſtifled, the National ſyſtem of Religion might have been eſtabliſhed on unqueſtioned authority; and apparent uniformity might have been obtained. On the other hand, by a complete reſtoration of the rights of conſcience, examination would be encouraged, knowledge would become generally diffuſed: ABUSE and SUPERSTITION would vaniſh before the increaſing light, and mankind would gradually attain the ſummit of moral dignity, and happineſs. But in the policy which we have adopted there is much injuſtice to no end or purpoſe; we are intolerant, without obtaining uniformity, or ſecuring the Public tranquillity; and we ſuſtain the miſchiefs of diſſention and perpetual controverſy, without reaping any improvement from free examination.

But let us for a moment ſuppoſe, if the ſuppoſition will not be too alarming to the timorous Churchman, that the Teſt Laws have been repealed, that every trace of intolerance has been expunged from our ſtatute book, and that a Commiſſion

commiſſion has been iſſued by due authority to Prelates and Lay Churchmen diſtinguiſhed for their wiſdom and the liberality of their ſentiments, requiring them to review the whole ſyſtem of our Religious inſtitutions, and to prepare a plan for its amendment. What meaſures of Reformation could in all probability be the reſult of this appointment, which would not be truly beneficial to the Community and ſuch as ought to be promoted, if there were not a ſingle Diſſenter in the Kingdom. Is it a poſſible conſequence of ſuch commiſſion that the Liturgy would be diſcontinued, and the unpremeditated prayer of the Diſſenters would be adopted in its ſtead? Or that the Liturgy might be continued and in ſome parts might remain unaltered; but in many places by the intermixture of ſentiments as diſputable as thoſe which would be expunged, would be rendered unacceptable to the great majority of Churchmen. Judging from the writings of Clarke and Hoadly, Jones and Jortin, Blackburne and Law, or from the known temper and writings of thoſe eminent Churchmen of this age, who probably would compoſe a part of the commiſſioners, and whoſe ſentiments would undoubtedly have great weight with their Lay colleagues, we may ſafely pronounce that no ſuch conſequence would be poſſible. It is the ſentiment of every liberal Churchman, and it has been often expreſſed, that the uſe of a Liturgy ought to be continued, and that our preſent Liturgy, in the main part of it

ought to remain unaltered; but it is their clear conviction alſo that the language of diſpute ſhould never be heard in our addreſſes to the Almighty, and therefore our Forms of Public Worſhip ought to be rendered as nearly as they can be, conformable to the practice and phraſeology of Scripture; ſome repetitions too they conceive, might be ſtruck out of the Liturgy; ſome improvements might be introduced in its arrangement; and ſome verbal and grammatical changes might alſo be made with obvious advantage. Theſe are alterations which to be approved, ſeem to need only to be ſtated: but rational and worthy men there may be who from exceſs of caution, and unperceived prejudices of various ſorts, may not be willing to ſubject our Public Forms of Worſhip to that reviſal and correction, which to many appear indiſpenſably neceſſary; but they will not be found in concert with Enthuſiaſts and the more ſagacious Hypocrites of Church Power, contending that the Liturgy is too perfect to admit improvement, or denying that the changes ſuggeſted would render that venerable compoſition more free from juſt objections, more conducive to rational Piety, and more effectual to ſatisfy and unite to the National Church, the generality of ſerious Chriſtians.

Can it be apprehended that ſubſcription to the preſent Articles of Religion would be diſcontinued, only that a new ſyſtem of Articles as exceptionable

ceptionable, as liable to diſpute, might be obtruded in their room? The apprehenſion is totally groundleſs; all the moſt diſtinguiſhed friends of Eccleſiaſtical Reformation have uniformly diſclaimed and combated the deſign.—They well know that to ſubſtitute new unſcriptural articles for the old, would be to change the ſubjects of diſpute, or to vary their poſition, but not to leſſen the violence of diſputation, or to conſult the honour of our Religion. They have generally declared their opinion that ſubſcription to any ſyſtem of human articles is improper; but if that form or practice were diſpenſed with, they could be well content, I am perſuaded, that the Thirty-nine Articles ſhould remain in the Book of Common Prayer as a monument of the theological opinions adopted by the Anglican Church in former ages, and a ſtandard from which it has not thought fit to deviate in the preſent.

Can it be ſeriouſly thought, that the meaſures of the Commiſſion here ſuppoſed, would tend to unnerve and relax the diſcipline of the Church? or to impair the dignity of the Biſhops, or in any degree to leſſen the general income of the Church? The apprehenſion of ſuch conſequences is too improbable; it is plainly an imaginary fear.—With reſpect to diſcipline, the direct reverſe of relaxation would be the certain effect of a farther Reformation of our Church. There are perhaps no abuſes which have been carried to ſo great exceſs, in the Church of

England, none which have had ſo fatal influence on the morals and Piety of the People, or which have excited ſuch juſt and general complaints, as the Non-Reſidence of the Clergy, and their frequent poſſeſſion of a Plurality of Livings. Whenever our Eccleſiaſtical ſyſtem ſhall undergo a ſerious review, thoſe abuſes will undoubtedly receive due correction: and if the Biſhops poſſeſs not ſufficient authority to compel the habitual reſidence of the Parochial Clergy, and to prevent any Plurality of Livings, as the law now ſtands; ſuch authority ought to be given to them, and the moſt effectual means ought to be provided, for ſecuring the due execution of any new law which might be paſſed, to prevent ſuch enormous abuſes in future.

Watson, Lett. to Abp. of Cant.

With reſpect to the dignity of the Biſhops and the general Revenues of the Church, the ſentiments of a Patriotic Biſhop have been explained with his uſual energy and intrepidity; and apparently, with the general approbation of thoſe Churchmen, who deem a Reformation of the Church expedient. If the advice of this diſtinguiſhed Prelate were taken upon this ſubject, is it probable that he would recommend a diminution of the authority of the Biſhops over the Parochial Clergy; or propoſe their degradation from their ſeats in Parliament? Nothing like either of theſe meaſures can be ſuppoſed; the worthy Prelate certainly has no ſuch deſign; his advice has already been offered to the Epiſcopal Bench, and

and had it been accepted by his Right Reverend Brethren, perhaps the true intereſts of the Church of England would have been better conſulted. For it cannot be diſſembled, that a general ſuſpicion at preſent prevails, that our Spiritual Lords are frequently and unduly influenced in their Parliamentary conduct by the hope of tranſlation. It is evident therefore that a prohibition of the future tranſlation of Biſhops, and as the Epiſcopal Sees become vacant a gradual equalization of their revenues, would tend to re-eſtabliſh the dignity and proper influence of the Epiſcopal character.

And if from funds which are neither difficult to be pointed out, nor improper to be thus employed, means were adopted to augment the ſmall benefices of our Church, to ſuch extent that each benefice would be a decent proviſion for the maintenance of a reſident Clergyman; who could then complain of a ſtrict execution of the laws againſt Non-Reſidence, or who could think that ſuch a diſtribution of the Church Revenues, as that here alluded to, would not tend to the advancement of Religion, and the general ſatisfaction of the Parochial Clergy?

The laſt ſubject of complaint reſpecting our Eccleſiaſtical Inſtitutions, viz. that of Tithes, ſhall be briefly noticed. This mode of providing by tithes for the Parochial Clergy, is often attended with great vexation to thoſe who receive and to thoſe who pay thoſe dues, and it manifeſtly

manifeſtly tends to obſtruct and defeat the endeavours of the Parochial Clergy to be uſeful in their reſpective ſtations. Whenever our Church Syſtem, therefore, ſhall undergo a reviſion, it is not improbable that this inconvenient kind of proviſion for the Clergy will be changed for another that is more unexceptionable. And if a valuation of the Tithes, payable to the Clergy throughout England, were made under due authority, on an average of their value for the three laſt years, and the average price of wheat for the ſame term were ſettled in a ſimilar manner, it appears that a full and proper equivalent for the Tithes to be aboliſhed might be obtained for each incumbent, in the ſhape of Corn-Rents, payable out of thoſe lands which are now charged with the payment of Tithes; the Corn-Rents to be levied as the Poor's Rates are collected, but by a ſeparate aſſeſſment; and the quarterly payment of theſe rents in four equal ſums to be enforced in the ſame ſummary manner. By ſuch regulations a proviſion for the ſupport of the Parochial Clergy would be eſtabliſhed, which would be adequate, permanent, and not liable to ſink or riſe with every fluctuation in the price of money: and thus the ſtrife and litigation which too frequently ariſe between the Paſtors and their Pariſhioners, reſpecting their preſent dues, would be totally extinguiſhed; they would learn to conſider each other as friends, whoſe intereſt was always the ſame; mutual good-will and harmony

mony would ſubſiſt between them with fewer interruptions; and the great buſineſs of Religion would be more ſucceſsfully advanced. In a political view, the benefits of the change, as tending to promote a more ſkilful and extenſive cultivation of the ground and an increaſe of population, are too apparent to need any illuſtration.

A Reformation of our Church, effected on theſe principles of moderation and mutual forbearance, would neither condemn any man's tenets nor impoſe them on others, it would not alter the ſtandard of our Religious Opinions, nor vary the general tenor of Public Worſhip, it would not tend to unhinge the Conſtitution, by weakening the juſt authority of the Ariſtocracy; it would have a different conſequence; by purifying the hierarchical part of it, and removing thoſe ſuſpicions of undue influence which now diſcredit the Epiſcopal Bench, it would tend to fortify the Conſtitution, and add freſh reputation to the Houſe of Lords. It would not affect the property of any Churchman now poſſeſſing benefices; it would eſtabliſh the propoſed alterations in the diſtribution of the Revenues of the Church gradually, and as vacancies might be opened by death or promotion. And having fixed for the Pariſh Clergy a mode of proviſion, which would be adequate, permanent, and free from that frequent litigation to which their preſent property is ſubject: and having alſo ſecured their habitual reſidence in their reſpective pariſhes; it would at once promote

mote the comfort of the Clergy and their People; and at the ſame time advance the intereſts of Religion and the political welfare of the State.

That an Eccleſiaſtical Reformation, conducted on theſe principles and to this extent, would ſatisfy all who are now diſſatisfied within the Church and without it, I am far from meaning to aſſert, for no poſſible meaſure of human power and wiſdom could produce that miraculous effect; but it would ſatisfy many wiſe and conſcientious Churchmen; it would reconcile many rational and moderate Diſſenters; it would tend greatly to prevent the future defection of Good Men from the National Church; and if ſome able Men ſhould ſtill continue to think their mode of inſtruction by unendowed Teachers of Religion, not only preferable to the Public Syſtem, but alone unexceptionably proper, and fit in theſe times to be adopted, ſtill I am perſuaded they would rejoice to behold the Cauſe of Religion promoted more ſucceſsfully by the National Clergy, under theſe regulations of the Church, although the diligence and ſucceſs of the Clergy might poſſibly for a time reduce their notion of the impropriety of any Public Eſtabliſhments of Religion to an unconſequential ſingularity of opinion.

It will be objected, undoubtedly, that INNOVATIONS are dangerous; for this has been the perpetual obſtacle to every improvement; and if the

the objection had not been very frequently over-ruled, Mankind, inſtead of enjoying the comforts of civilized life, and attaining the dignity of rational and religious Agents, muſt have continued ſtill in their ſavage ſtate, wandering among the woods as wild as the beaſts with whom they were ſurrounded. The alleged danger of Innovation, therefore, when deſtitute of any apparent probability from the circumſtances of the change propoſed, can only be deemed the vague ſurmiſe of an imaginary fear, the contempt of wiſe men, and the bugbear of fools alone.

But it will be obſerved, that Innovations in matters appertaining to Religion are always attended with peculiar danger; and that, in fact, few inſtances have occurred of a conſiderable change effected in the Religion of any Country, without producing Commotion, and even Revolution in the State. If this is a valid objection to any improvement in our Religious Inſtitutions at preſent, it was a valid objection in the days of Luther, and in the earlier ages of Chriſtianity. Many perſecutions and many calamitous viciſſitudes of fortune were endured, by the Primitive Chriſtians, for three centuries before their Religion became the Eſtabliſhed Faith of the Roman Empire: and in modern times, the Reformation of the abuſes of the Church of Rome convulſed all Europe for ages. But each of theſe innovations, ſo highly bene-

ficial to Mankind, was fatal to the ancient Religion of thoſe reſpective ages. Long eſtabliſhed practices were condemned, deep-rooted prejudices were reprobated by the firſt Preachers of the Goſpel, and their Succeſſors the Miniſters of Proteſtantiſm. After a long and violent ſtruggle, Paganiſm firſt, and Popery afterwards, were vanquiſhed by the Religion of the Bible; and the ſucceſsful Innovators, in each inſtance, took poſſeſſion of thoſe Temples, from which, by the force of reaſon and argument, they had driven their Adverſaries.

But no ſimilar events are now to be apprehended from the propoſed Reformation of the Church of England. The improvements ſuggeſted, as they would be beyond compariſon leſs beneficial than the two great Innovations juſt mentioned, ſo they would be leſs hoſtile to the ancient ſyſtem which they are calculated not to deſtroy but to reform. The changes are propoſed not by the Adverſaries of the Church, but by Churchmen, jealous of her honour and anxious for her welfare; and if acceded to, they would be not the humiliating terms impoſed by a victorious foe, but wiſe and ſeaſonable conceſſions, adopted at the recommendation of friends for the ſake of general conciliation.—The propoſitions contain nothing harſh, or excluſive, nothing injurious to the preſent Clergy, or tending to alter the Form of Government either in Church or State: If there is candour, equity,

equity, or prudence, in the great Body of our Churchmen, a Reformation thus adopted, to heal diviſions, and to comprehend and unite in one Society, Chriſtians of various uneſſential opinions, could produce nothing like Commotion or Revolution: in a political view it would be a harmleſs, pacific, and even an advantageous change; and its conſequences reſpecting Morals and Religion would be truly ſalutary to the Community.

On this brief conſideration of the firſt part of my ſubject, it ſeems evident that no peculiarity of Religious Opinion which Dr. Price had, or could have adopted, ought to have excluded him from the Common Rights of Citizens, or ſubjected him to any legal reproach; and that from the repeal of thoſe ſtatutes, under which ſuch worthy Men have long endured unmerited diſgrace, no conſequence with any appearance of probability can be expected to reſult, which would not be conducive to piety and virtue, and alike beneficial to the State and to the National Church. Let us proceed to conſider his political hereſies, as by ſome they are thought; and to inquire whether in this view of his character, he were not equally capable of exculpation, and ought not to have received the ſame complete abſolution.

It is true, that Dr. Price did not ſcruple to declare his opinion, that the Conſtitution of England is deformed by many abuſes; that the

People are mocked with a mere ſhadow of Repreſentation; that the Houſe of Commons is ſunk in the groſſeſt corruption. He was among the foremoſt to convey theſe ſentiments to the Public, in warm and indignant language; and his ſtrenuous zeal contributed greatly to animate the Popular Meetings, and encourage their Reſolution to attempt the Reformation of Parliament. If theſe were errors of a pernicious tendency, and proofs of a ſeditious turbulence of diſpoſition, ſome of the beſt and wiſeſt men of this Country, as they have uſually been eſteemed, have fallen into the ſame errors, and have manifeſted a ſimilar diſpoſition. Of the diſtinguiſhed ſenators alluded to, the name of one only ſhall be produced; but that a name which the accuſer of Price once highly reſpected. If his ſentiments of Sir George Savile have been changed, the impartial public has not ceaſed to revere him as a patriot of more unſullied honour than any other perhaps in the annals of England. It was his aim, indiſputably, not to deſtroy the Conſtitution, but to remove its abuſes, to correct its imperfections, and thus to augment the happineſs of millions who live under its protection. Will candour then or will juſtice permit us to ſuppoſe that Price did not act with the ſame benevolent view? Or are ſentiments and conduct, which are innocent and even laudable in Savile, ſeditious and criminal when adopted by Price?—Reſpecting the

the corruption of Parliament, and the decayed ſtate of our Conſtitution, their opinions, their language, and their conduct were ſimilar.— With the reputation of Price, as a Political Reformer, that of Savile is intimately connected. Calumny may wiſh to ſeparate the Philoſopher, whom ſhe hates, from the Patriot whom ſhe would fear directly to attack. But ſhe cannot diſunite theſe excellent Citizens, and preſent them in a different point of view; ſhe is unable to ſelect the object of her malice, and ſhoot her envenomed arrow at him, without hazard to the other; the ſhaft which wounds the reputation of Price, muſt injure the fame of Savile; and when our incomparable Patriot receives the praiſe which his Benevolence and Public Spirit juſtly deſerve, Price muſt be intitled to ſhare the commendation with him.

But I ſhall not content myſelf with having ſheltered the Political conduct of Dr. Price, under the example of Sir George Savile; his exertions to promote the Reſtoration of our Conſtitution, may be defended in a way that is more becoming the dignity of his much injured character. Let it be conſidered then, that men do not attempt to correct and improve what they wiſh to deſtroy; that a ſtrong diſapprobation of a body of National Repreſentatives returned by the little, venal, and enſlaved Boroughs, and the corrupt and factious ſtate of Parliament which is the neceſſary conſequence, may

may well conſiſt with a decided approbation of the general frame of our Government; that he beſt proves his attachment to the Conſtitution, not who defends with blind or ſelfiſh zeal every defect which time, or fraud, or miſguided authority may have introduced; but he who wiſhes to preſerve the ancient foundations untouched, and the general plan unaltered; yet endeavours to remove the blemiſhes which diſgrace the venerable ſtructure; to repair what age has injured, to ſupply what experience has proved to be deficient; and to compel the ſubtle thief, or more audacious robber, to reſtore what each may have purloined or plundered; that the ſtrength and beauty of the Fabric may thus be completed. And when this is done, or attempted in a regular way, by means unexceptionably legal, it is not on ſuch ground, that the charge of diſloyalty or ſedition can be ſupported.

But Dr. Price admired the Conſtitution of the American Republic, and exulted at the ſucceſs of the French Revolution; and from theſe admitted facts it was inferred, and preſſed with the utmoſt oratorial vehemence, that he was criminally partial to the Governments of France and America, that he was hoſtile to the Conſtitution of England, that he aimed at the introduction of a Republic in this Country, that he was a bad Man, a bad Citizen, and a dangerous Innovator, and juſtly merited the joint puniſhment of pri-

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vate cenſure and that legal diſgrace which the laws already had inflicted upon him.

Such was the thin diſguiſe aſſumed by ſpiritual perſecution; ſuch the poor pretence thrown over the real wiſh of the enemies of Liberty to introduce or extend a ſyſtem of political intolerance, which happily is at preſent little, if at all, known among us. But ſurely it is an artifice unworthy that plain ſincerity which beſt becomes the Legiſlature of a great Country to eſtabliſh, or preſerve a Religious Teſt, not with a view to repreſs any particular ſect or doctrine of Religion, but indirectly to diſcourage ſome offenſive peculiarity of political opinion. The rule from which a Legiſlature ſhould never depart, is to adopt no purpoſe which is unfit to be avowed, and having adopted fit purpoſes, to purſue them by plain and direct methods. To ſupport the Sacramental Teſt, becauſe it is conceived to be a convenient inſtrument to prevent the growth of Republican Principles, is to authoriſe Intolerance in the Church, that the Civil Government may be enabled, at the ſame time, to practice indirectly that political Intolerance which the law does not directly admit; it is to eſtabliſh a profanation of a Holy Rite of Religion, oſtenſibly to give the National Religion an unwarrantable ſupport, but, in fact, to diſcourage political ſpeculation, and to maintain the Conſtitution by means which it diſclaims, by cunning, indirect and injurious methods,

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by the oppreſſion of real innocence, and the puniſhment of a factitious offence, which the Legiſlature has not thought fit ſpecifically, and with due preciſion, to define.

It has been already proved, that no limitation on the exerciſe of our rational faculties can be beneficial to Mankind; that political ſpeculation as well as religious diſquiſition ought to be perfectly unreſtrained; that free examination alone can check the growth of abuſes, either in thoſe Inſtitutions which are of the higheſt importance, or in thoſe which are of a ſubordinate rank, and that alone can ſecure to Society the progreſſive improvement in all its eſtabliſhments of which it is capable, from the increaſing exertions of induſtry, the more general diffuſion of property, and the gradual advancement of the human character, in knowledge, in civility, in the love of order, juſtice, and rational liberty. Fortunately for this Country, the State has been leſs jealous than the Church; and though reſtraints have been unjuſtly impoſed on religious diſquiſition, the right of political ſpeculation remains in a great meaſure unabridged. In this reſpect, the Teſt Laws operate only incidentally, and as it were by chance; and the laws enacted to ſupport the excluſion of the Stuart Family from the Throne of England, can produce their effect only on thoſe Men, who, with Mr. Burke, deny the power of Parliament as the Agents of the Nation, to regulate or in any manner to alter the

the ſucceſſion to the Throne. But queſtions have ariſen, whether the Houſe of Commons is a fair Repreſentative of the People; whether the Houſe of Peers might not better anſwer the purpoſe of its Inſtitution, if no tranſlation of Biſhops were allowed; whether the influence of the Crown is not too great, even after all the reductions which it has undergone ſince the cloſe of Lord North's Adminiſtration. On theſe ſubjects, I apprehend that there is no exiſting law according to which in its plain and direct meaning the moſt eccentric opinion can be puniſhed.

Theſe are ſubjects on which diſcuſſion is underſtood to be free, and ſome of the wiſeſt Men this Country ever produced, in all theſe reſpects, have pronounced our Conſtitution faulty. That in them all it is faulty, in ſome degree, is perhaps indiſputable; but to what extent of danger theſe abuſes expoſe the Community, opinions may vary: whether the Conſtitution ought to undergo a more or a leſs extenſive Reformation, whether it ought, with all its imperfections, to be ſupported and to remain wholly unreformed, or the political ſtructure is too far decayed to admit repair, and ought to be taken down and modelled anew; theſe are queſtions which ſeem to be left open to the diſcretion of each Diſquiſitor; reſpecting them no line has been plainly drawn by the laws, beyond which political criticiſm ſhall not be allowed to paſs,

nor has any clear criterion been fixed, by which the zeal of Public Spirit may be diſtinguiſhed, in a legal view, from the temerity of raſh Innovation. It would indeed be difficult, if not impoſſible, by any previous definition, to aſcertain the limits within which ſpeculation on conſtitutional ſubjects ought to be confined; the reſtriction would be alike contradictory to the principles of the Conſtitution, and incompatible with the intereſts of the Community.

Political Bigots, however, and Impoſtors in the State, like thoſe in the Church, may wiſh to ſuppreſs this freedom of diſquiſition; and to obtain a new, or a more extenſive code of political perſecution. But the temper of the times is adverſe to every ſpecies of Intolerance; and ariſtocratical Men muſt deſpair to effect that extenſion in any direction. And yet, as opportunity offers, they ſeem not unwilling to hazard the moſt unuſual ſtretches of Parliamentary Power, to puniſh the expreſſion of bold but undeniable truths. When a Petition was preſented, in the laſt Seſſion, to the Houſe of Commons, complaining of great abuſes in the late election for Weſtminſter, almoſt in the very terms uſed by Sir George Savile, on the general ſubject of our *Septennial Fairs or Markets*, in his Addreſs to his Conſtituents, the unwelcome truths grated on the ear of Parliament, and hardly could the rage of ſome hot Men be kept within any bounds

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of prudence by the two wiſeſt Members of that Aſſembly. But for their judicious interpoſition, a few truths ſtrongly expreſſed, and ſomewhat too bluntly addreſſed to Parliament, by the haſty reſentment of ſome intemperate Men, might have been productive of the moſt pernicious conſequences.

But a foreigner, by his repeated attacks upon our Conſtitution, has given more ſerious occaſion to Government, to exerciſe their diſpoſition to forbearance. I truſt they have reſolved to paſs by the Author of the book alluded to, without any legal animadverſion; for in ſuch caſes, legal animadverſion muſt be unſafe, or it muſt be unneceſſary.

If the Rights of Man had been a book feebly written, it would be folly, for it is needleſs to inſiſt on any ſtronger objection, to drag the Author and his impotent malice into general notice by proſecution. But it is a book ably and forcibly written, though neither with candour nor wiſdom. In that piece, Mr. Payne attempts to depreciate the Conſtitution, or as he chuſes to term it the Government of England, by painting its inconveniences and defects in the ſtrongeſt colours, while its preſent advantages and the capability of its receiving in a ſafe and regular manner, the higheſt future improvements are artfully thrown out of ſight: He ſupports the doctrine of Republicaniſm, with an enthuſiaſtic zeal, with an impoſing confidence, and with rea-

× See Burke's "Reflections, on &c" and Paine's "Rights of Man," in one vol. penes me. W.H.

ſoning often ſpecious, and always daring; ſome truths are interſperſed among many fallacies and miſrepreſentations, and a vein of coarſe, but ſtrongly ſarcaſtic wit runs through and clumſily enlivens the whole. His Counſel, to break up and deſtroy the noble fabric of our Conſtitution, and rebuild a new political edifice on the plans of America, ſeems to be conveyed in the moſt dangerous ſhape, and far more likely to make an impreſſion on thoſe, to whom it is chiefly addreſſed, than if it had been delivered in a more claſſical compoſition, in which more attention had been employed to avoid the groſſneſs of indecent language, and more ſolicitude diſplayed to ſhun whatever might tend to excite the loweſt claſſes of the People to acts of violence and injuſtice. But miſchievous as the effects of that book may be, they cannot be ſtopt by proſecution; the attempt would only aggravate the danger. If no law has been provided by the Legiſlature for the direct and immediate purpoſe of protecting by penal ſanctions, the general principles of our Conſtitution; no attempt, by any forced conſtructions of law to puniſh the Adverſary of our Conſtitution, can be with reaſon apprehended from the virtue and wiſdom of thoſe Men who compoſe a majority of the Cabinet. But if any penal ſtatute actually does exiſt according to the direct meaning of which, though hitherto miſunderſtood, his virulent cavils, at the frame of our Government, can be conſidered

conſidered as crimes, and the Caviller himſelf be ſubjected to puniſhment, it appears that ſuch a law would be much more fit to be repealed than to be executed. For the right of intellectual freedom ought not to be violated, to prevent any occaſional inconvenience from the abuſive exerciſe of that right; the violation is always odious, and in the preſent inſtance would be very impolitic. Intolerance in the State, like perſecution in the Church, would diſhonour and weaken what it was deſigned to ſupport.— The People cannot be compelled to love the Conſtitution; that affection muſt be voluntary, or it will not be felt; and it can only be generally felt, where happineſs is generally and ſecurely enjoyed. During the miſeries of the American War no ſymptom of diſaffection to the Conſtitution appeared; and the bulk of the Engliſh nation remains ſtill ſtrongly attached to it. The Proſelytes to republican notions are few at preſent, and inconſiderable: They probably would be increaſed in number by proſecution; but by impunity a wiſe forbearance will effectually prevent any eventual danger from their ſpeculations, provided the condition of the People be rendered more eaſy by the farther diminution of their burthens, and their wiſhes be gratified by a timely correction of thoſe abuſes in the Conſtitution, which have been ſo juſtly complained of. By theſe means, and by theſe means alone, the poſſible growth of a great Republican Party in this Country may be prevented; and

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thoſe ſeeds of diſſention, which have been ſo widely diſſeminated, may be trampled under foot, with contempt and abhorrence, by a contented and happy People.

To the moſt ſincere Friends of Public Freedom in this Country, the counſel of Mr. Payne appears ill-timed, impracticable, undeſirable for England, and more likely to retard than to accelerate the recovery of our juſt rights; and the moſt judicious Supporters of French Liberty deem his advice not leſs unſeaſonable for France, where it is fitted to obſtruct the ſettlement of the Country and to prevent the ſecure enjoyment of Liberty, under that free Conſtitution which the National Aſſembly, with ſo much difficulty and hazard, and by ſuch uncommon exertions of public ſpirit and political wiſdom, had achieved for the French nation.

If, therefore, Dr. Price had concurred with Mr. Payne, in his wild project for the univerſal eſtabliſhment of Republican Forms of Government; if he had aſſerted with him, that the Engliſh Nation has *NO CONSTITUTION*, and had propoſed an attempt not to reſtore but to ſubvert what we call our Conſtitution, that, after the example of America, a NEW Republic might be built on the ruins of our ancient Form of Government: I muſt frankly own his character would have been undefended, and his memory unhonoured by me. I ſhould not have queſtioned his *proud integrity;* I ſhould hâve thought

thought him unconſcious of the miſchief and miſery he was promoting; I ſhould have conſidered him an honeſt Enthuſiaſt, whoſe imagination had been heated by the contemplation of great Revolutions; as that of Mr. Payne may have been inflamed with extraordinary fervor, by his having been an actor in the Revolution of America. But I am aware that an honeſt Enthuſiaſt may be a dangerous Politician; that he may propoſe projects replete with miſchief and ruin, and equally fatal to himſelf and to his followers; to the Community, and to the Cauſe of Liberty, which he means to ſerve.

But Dr. Price was a Patriot of a different claſs; though perfectly diſintereſted, he was not an enthuſiaſtic Politician; though active and public ſpirited, he was cool and rational; though ſtrongly attached to Liberty, he was prudent and cautious to avoid unneceſſary danger, not to himſelf, but to the Public.—When he conſidered the ſtate of England, he beheld an excellent Conſtitution diſgraced by corruptions of every ſort; but he ſaw too, that ſomething more was left to the People than the bare right *to petition the Legiſlature;* that the maſs of the Community was yet untainted by corruption, and zealous for Liberty; that in many diſtricts the juſt power of the Conſtituent Body, to controul their Repreſentatives, was ſtill preſerved entire; while ſome of the Peers, and many even of thoſe Members of the Houſe of Commons, whoſe title to ſit in

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that Aſſembly is unconſtitutional, diſplayed a generous zeal to deſtroy abuſe and uſurpation, and reſtore to the People their ancient Conſtitutional Right. In theſe circumſtances, he ſaw, with other Friends to Reformation, no reaſon to deſpair that a reſtoration of our ancient Right of a full and fair Repreſentation, with triennial or even annual elections, might be gradually recovered for the nation by legal and pacific means. As on the one hand, therefore, he ſcorned meanly to cheat his Countrymen by adulating their prejudices, concealing the faults and abuſes of the Conſtitution, and endeavouring to lull them into a falſe ſecurity, that would have been fatal to their freedom; ſo, on the other hand, perceiving that no neceſſity for great hazards exiſted, that the alternative offered to us was, not what was preſented to the French and American Nations, whether Slavery or a New Conſtitution was to be choſen; but whether a Civil War, for the chance of a Republic, was to be preferred to the gradual melioration of our mixed Form of Government by peaceful means; he wiſely preferred ſafe and progreſſive improvement to the doubtful event of great but hazardous Revolution.

And when the Men, who promoted a Reformation of the Conſtitution, were unfortunately divided into two diſtinct parties, one of which adopted that more moderate plan of improvements, which Mr. Pitt afterwards endeavoured

deavoured to eſtabliſh, and the other, eſpouſing a more extenſive ſyſtem of Reformation endeavoured to reſtore the right of univerſal ſuffrage, the ſupport of Dr. Price was uniformly and from an early period given to the more moderate propoſitions. It is impoſſible, with the leaſt appearance of equity and reaſon, to impute to the Duke of Richmond, and other Gentlemen who promoted the more extenſive plan, any undue partiality to republican ſchemes of Government: but it is not leſs evidently contrary to candour and juſtice, to charge that improper predilection on Men, whoſe influence in times of much diſcontent was conſtantly employed to recommend to the People thoſe leſs extenſive demands, which appeared more likely to be attained by regular and pacific means.

About the ſame time, when the attempt to ſeize the Charter of the Eaſt-India Company, and to veſt in a Body of Commiſſioners the whole civil, military, and commercial Patronage of the Company, with an unlimited command of the Treaſury of Bengal, had excited a general apprehenſion of danger to the Conſtitution, the Engliſh Reformers, with few exceptions, exerted the utmoſt zeal to preſerve the juſt Prerogative of the Crown. Whether this alarm were ill-founded, or otherwiſe, is not the queſtion before us; it is ſufficient to obſerve, that the avowed motive for a vigorous oppoſition to that meaſure by the Aſſociations, and

particularly by the general Body of the Diſſenters, with whom Dr. Price, on this occaſion, certainly concurred in ſentiment, was their conviction, that the principles of our limited Monarchy were endangered and ought to be ſupported. It is unreaſonable, it is unjuſt, to condemn ſuch Men as diſloyal Citizens, from a detached phraſe in a ſpeculative Work, from an accidental expreſſion of fervor at a convivial Meeting, againſt the teſtimony of their general conduct, and many practical proofs of their ſincere and ſettled wiſh, not to ſubvert but to reſtore the Conſtitution.

Conſidered by this candid rule, which is almoſt always the reaſonable and the juſt rule of Judgment, the conduct of Dr. Price reſpecting the Revolution in France is free from objection. His exultation on the eſtabliſhment of French Liberty, was expreſſed in uniſon with the general joy of his Countrymen; who without any invidious reference to the Conſtitution of England, or any wiſh to adopt the peculiarities of the New Conſtitution of France, rejoiced with him that the millions of men who had been Slaves in that Country, had regained THEIR NATURAL RIGHT TO BE FREE. And ſurely it is no extravagant compliment to his Political Judgment, to believe that although he approved the full Repreſentation of the People in a ſingle Chamber in that Country; in which no hereditary Chamber of Nobles ever had been known; yet he totally diſapproved any deſign to copy

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that example in England; where an hereditary Peerage has been eſtabliſhed from a very early period of our Government; and where it is ſufficiently evident that in the preſent circumſtances of the Country, ſuch a change in our Legiſlature would be at once impracticable and undeſirable.†

And with reſpect to the American Republic he may have thought very conſiſtently, that it was a Form of Government admirably adapted to the circumſtances of that Country at the time when the Revolution was effected, and yet very unfit to be introduced in this Country, which is in many important reſpects circumſtanced in a manner that is widely different.—He may have contemplated with pleaſure that equality in the diſtribution of property which has happily taken place in America, and the conſequent equality of ranks and privileges which the Citizens there enjoy; he may have expreſſed a mixed ſurprize and approbation of the humble port of Government in that Country and the cheap expence at which it is ſupported, when compared with the lofty and expenſive grandeur of our European Courts; and yet on conſidering his general conduct no reaſon may be found to doubt that he approved the Monarchical part of our Government; and even applauded the conduct of the other great and enlightened Nation of Europe, when with conſummate prudence in the moment of emancipa-

† A widely different opinion prevails in 1800.

tion they reſolved ſtill to retain the Monarchy of France.

But Dr. Price deemed the condition of the Citizens of America preferable to that of the ſubjects of Great-Britain. And who that is a capable Judge will deny it? By the generous treatment of Great Britain for ages before the unhappy quarrel, the inhabitants of America had been enabled to place themſelves in a ſituation more fortunate perhaps than that of any other Nation in the World. They now enjoy the benefits of Civilized Society, without its corruptions; they have the advantage of an equal diſtribution of property, without the uſual Licence and tumult of Democratic States: for a population increaſing with a rapidity unprecedented in any other Country they have an extent of territory amply adequate for ages to come; almoſt totally exempt from taxes they ſupport their Government with the frugality of a little Swiſs Republic, and yet have acquired the weight and conſequence of a conſiderable State, ſoon to rank on a footing of equality with the firſt Empires in the world. But could Britain attain that enviable degree of happineſs, merely by adopting the American Form of Government? No, certainly; were this adoption practicable, which undoubtedly it is not, yet unleſs a ſimilarity in all the other circumſtances could be obtained, a ſimilar Form of Goverment would not confer equal happineſs; it is much more proba-

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ble that it would create greater inconveniences than thoſe which are at preſent complained of. But though this probably was the opinion of Dr. Price, yet, when he ſurveyed the different circumſtances in each Country, and the different Governments correſponding with theſe circumſtances which had been eſtabliſhed in America and Britain, and compared the degree of felicity, which, under theſe diſſimilar Inſtitutions, was enjoyed in each Community reſpectively, he weighed their merits with the impartiality of a Philoſopher, and gave ſuperior praiſe where ſuperior happineſs was found to be produced. Is this a liberty of ſpeculation not to be endured in England? It is not a greater liberty than has been allowed in France, before the Revolution, under a Government then thought leſs indulgent than our own.

The Accuſer of Price extols, with juſtice, the political writings of Monteſquieu; and cites, with peculiar applauſe, his enthuſiaſtic praiſes of the Conſtitution of England. And yet let me aſk, by what ſlaviſh adherent of Deſpotiſm, in France, has Monteſquieu been cenſured, for this partiality to our limited Monarchy, as an evil ſubject, and diſaffected to that abſolute Government under which he dared to avow theſe generous ſentiments? Or what good reaſon can be given, why the venerable Price ſhould not be treated with equal candour and reſpect as Monteſquieu himſelf? What has the Engliſh Di-

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vine done, more than the French Lawyer, for which he ought to be degraded from the claſs of thoſe true Patriots, who have laboured at once to promote the liberties and to preſerve the peace of their Country? Monteſquieu ſaw that the introduction of Political Liberty into France, in his time, was impoſſible. He ſubmitted to the mild and mitigated Deſpotiſm of Louis XV. but he taught his Countrymen thoſe leſſons of Public Freedom and Happineſs, which gradually prepared them, in the next age, to overthrow their deſpotic Government, and to eſtabliſh a ſyſtem of Political Liberty under a limited Monarch. Price ſaw the happier ſtate of Mankind in thoſe Countries, where ſimple manners and a general equality of property admitted a Republican Form of Government; but he knew that, in his time, the Eſtabliſhment of a Republic in England was impracticable, that it was a mode of Government unſuitable to the very unequal diſtribution of our property,† contrary to the general ſentiments of the nation, and ill-adapted to conduct the political buſineſs of our widely extended Empire. In theſe circumſtances he did what a wiſe and good Man ought to have done; he owned the ſuperior happineſs enjoyed under the more popular and leſs expenſive Government of America; but he zealouſly promoted that moderate correction of abuſes, in the frame and duration of our Parliaments, which alone can prevent future convulſions

† But how did the great landed ariſtocracy become poſſeſſed of their property?

convulſions in England, and perpetuate our preſent form of limited Monarchy.

In his preface to the Spirit of Laws, Monteſquieu ſays, "Plato thanked Heaven that he was born in the ſame age with Socrates; and I thank Heaven that I was born a ſubject of the Government of France." Dr. Price might have adopted ſimilar language in England: He did more; he acted up to the ſentiment which it expreſſes. In the year 1780, he was invited by the Congreſs to go over to America; he was requeſted to accept a principal Office in the State, and to lend his aſſiſtance in the eſtabliſhment of a new ſyſtem of Finance, to ſupport the Government of the United States; yet, thus honourably requeſted to become a Citizen, and in ſome meaſure the Legiſlator of the American Republic, he refuſed to quit his native Country, and determined to live and die a ſubject of the Monarchy of England.

Whence then, it may be aſked, has ſprung that torrent of foul reproach, which has been poured on the head of this amiable and diſintereſted Reformer, and on whole Societies of Men with whom he had united in the generous purſuit of Political Reformation. What could provoke ſuch fierce animoſity, ſuch inſatiable malevolence; far exceeding the utmoſt rancour of oppoſition, which the Aſſociations experienced during the period of their greateſt activity? Perſonal enmity, diſappointed ambition, the loſs of popularity,

popularity, and the deſpair to recover it, each of theſe circumſtances may have prompted a mind naturally irritable, to an attack on a diſtinguiſhed Leader of the Popular Party; whoſe principles Mr. Burke certainly never approved, and by whoſe oppoſition his ſcheme of power had been not long before defeated. But ſomewhat more than theſe combined cauſes ſeems ſtill to be wanting to account for theſe extreme hoſtilities.

After Mr. Pitt's motion, in the year 1785, to amend the Repreſentation of the People in Parliament, had been rejected by the joint efforts of the Ariſtocracy, they ſeem to have thought the danger which had threatened their ill-acquired power in the Boroughs was at an end; that the People who had not ſupported with ſufficient vigour the attempt to reſtore the Conſtitution, when the fatal effects of Corruption and Ariſtocratical Uſurpation had been recently felt, would be lulled by the uſual effects of Peace into a total neglect of their Conſtitutional Rights, till, by their continued acquieſcence, thoſe abuſes would be confirmed by a preſcriptive authority, which would continually gain new ſtrength, and which no future effort of the People would be able to overcome.

But in theſe flattering expectations the Ariſtocracy were much miſtaken. The Aſſociated Bodies, though unſucceſsful in 1785, were not diſpirited by their defeat. Their Principles of Reformation

Reformation had been adopted by a Miniſter who had obtained the confidence of his Country, and to whom the friends of the Aſſociation were juſtly attached with peculiar warmth. On theſe Principles, a comprehenſive plan for amending the ſyſtem of our Repreſentation had been formed and propoſed to Parliament, with every advantage which the zeal and eloquence of that Miniſter could beſtow. Repulſed as he was by the Commons, it was then evident that he had not wholly miſcarried. His plan was approved, though not adopted; it was allowed that it would form a much better ſyſtem of Repreſentation than the preſent; and though Parliament had negatived the motion by a great majority, yet the meaſure appeared to be rather poſtponed than rejected by the public.

The popular Agents were not then ſtunned and aſtoniſhed by the blow they had received, they did not then deſpair of final ſucceſs. They knew their plan to be moderate, they felt it to be important, and they truſted, that a ſhort time would ſhow that the Rights and true Intereſts of the People were better underſtood; that the extent and danger of Election abuſes and Parliamentary Corruption were more clearly diſcerned; and the importance and neceſſity of a Public Reformation were more generally felt by the Community. And theſe expectations have not been wholly diſappointed. Since that period, the Aſſociations have been reinforced by the

acceſſion of many public-ſpirited and able men; and new Aſſociations on ſimilar grounds have been formed in different parts of the kingdom. Even in this indolent time of Peace, the ſpirit of Reformation for ſome years has been manifeſtly riſing; and if the popular Party ſhould fortunately add prudence equal to their increaſing zeal, ſhould endeavour to profit by their paſt miſtakes, and avoid diviſions by firmly adhering to temperate propoſitions, it ſeems probable that a ſubſtantial Reformation of Parliament with every public bleſſing in its train may be accompliſhed ſoon, by pacific means, and in the regular courſe of Parliamentary buſineſs.†

It was impoſſible that a jealous Ariſtocracy could be inattentive ſpectators of this alteration in the mind of the Public. Undoubtedly, they have watched the progreſs of the ſpirit of Reformation with much and increaſing anxiety. At firſt, their fears for thoſe abuſes in the Boroughs to which they owe their unconſtitutional power, were not excited in any great degree; but at the nearer approach of danger, their apprehenſions grew more ſerious; and what was averſion to the popular Cauſe before, was ſoon improved into keen and violent hatred. At laſt, the eſtabliſhment of a Legiſlative Aſſembly in France on equitable principles of Repreſentation, the exultation expreſſed by the People here, on the ſucceſsful efforts which had been exerted to emancipate the French nation; and the apparent

† Not till 1832,—40 years after.

rent eaſe with which a tranſition might be made in this Country, from admiring their Form of Repreſentation to improving our own, theſe united circumſtances puſhed their panic to its preſent extremity. From that moment, their animoſity no longer has known any bounds of juſtice, moderation, or prudence; the PEOPLE and their juſt Conſtitutional claims have been the conſtant objects of their unqualified ſcorn and deriſion, their unmitigated abhorrence and execration: and ſtill in each wild and moody change of temper, theſe alternate exceſſes of rage and ridicule, of horror and contempt, have been but the varied expreſſions of their FEAR.

But there was method in their madneſs, and even their terror was not without art and cunning. It was well imagined, though the idea wants the merit of originality, that the ſpirit of Bigotry might be oppoſed with ſucceſs to the ſpirit of Liberty; and that an attack upon our Political Reformers ought to begin with the Diſſenters and to be chiefly pointed againſt them; not becauſe they are more vulnerable in any part of their Public conduct than their Aſſociates; but becauſe againſt them it would be eaſy to revive ancient jealouſies, which for ſome time had appeared nearly extinct; to rouze the fears of Churchmen for the ſafety of the Biſhops, and the eſtabliſhed Religion; and by inliſting that powerful body of men againſt the Promoters of Political Reformation to ſecure for one age at leaſt,

the defeat of their deſign. In the laſt century, a ſimilar experiment had been tried with conſiderable ſucceſs, againſt the Government of King William. The Zealots of the Church were then taught to confound an attachment to Liberty, with averſion to the National Religion; to think the Church was in danger, becauſe Perſecution was in ſome degree reſtrained, and to plot the ruin of his Government, that the Proteſtant Religion might be ſafe under the Protection of the Catholic James.—In the next Reign near its cloſe, the Hereditary Right of the Stuarts was maintained by the ſame Party, with a zeal which the Diſciples of Mr. Burke could hardly exceed, to prevent the ſucceſſion of the Hanoverian Family, and the ſuppoſed unavoidable conſequence of that event, the deſtruction of the Church of England.—And now, after experience has repeatedly proved its folly and injuſtice, the ancient cry has reſumed freſh powers of deluſion; the reaſon of the beſotted multitude is once more confounded; in the complete Toleration requeſted by Diſſenters, they foreſee the overthrow of the Church; in the growing ſpirit of Liberty, they dread hoſtility to Biſhops and their Articles, to the dignifyed ſolemnity of their Cathedral and the pious ſimplicity of their Parochial Worſhip. Their zeal is again excited for the ſuppreſſion of Liberty; and in their Judgment, the ſafety of our Religion depends on the continuance of a Septennial Parliament,

and

and the preſervation of the little venal and enſlaved Boroughs in Wiltſhire and Cornwall.

The time alſo for the commencement of this attack on the Reformers was ſkilfully choſen.—The partial diſorders which afflicted France, during her ſtruggle for Freedom, and which are perhaps inſeparable from every great Revolution, were then at their height. To a Rhetorical Writer theſe calamities preſented an eaſy opportunity to dreſs up a train of horrible phantoms, to affright his Readers; and having thus ſubdued their terrifyed imaginations, he would find it no very difficult taſk to confound in their apprehenſion peaceful Reformation, with hoſtile Revolution; he would be able to perſuade them, that CONSPIRACY was at work here, that a daring faction of Republicans were at the eve of Inſurrection, preparing to burſt forth, and determined to involve their Country in all the miſeries of Civil War. This advantage was ſeen by the Gentleman, who is perhaps the moſt Enthuſiaſtic Adherent of our Ariſtocracy; who has long been conſidered as the confidential Interpreter of their Sentiments, the Dragoman of their little Mock Divan. He ſaw the happy opportunity, and he ſeized it; but not without ſome prudent delay produced his Reflections; written in a mode of eloquence that is impure indeed, and meretricious; but not ill calculated by rapid declamation, and ſplendid imagery to ſurpriſe and ſeduce the Public opinion. By his vehement harangues in Parliament againſt the repeal

repeal of the Teſt Act, the minds of zealous Churchmen had been duly prepared to receive the intended impreſſion.—By this more vehement Publication, the fears, the rage, and all the holy antipathies of our Zealots were increaſed to an extravagant degree; the moſt odious and chimerical ſuſpicions were widely ſpread and received with implicit credulity; the bigotry of the great vulgar, and the ſmall, was thoroughly inflamed; and Intolerance was ſtimulated by the ſelf-vaunted Friend of Toleration, to repeat at Birmingham the ſame horrid exceſſes, which at the inſtigation of a wild Fanatic in 1780, had convulſed the Empire, and nearly conſumed the Capital.

But in a Country where free diſcuſſion is not wholly prohibited, nothing that is contrary to truth and reaſon, nothing that is hoſtile to the general intereſts of the Community, can be permanently ſupported merely by rhetorical artifice, and eloquent miſrepreſentation. When Civil and Religious Liberty were thus attacked, their Friends were not wanting to their defence.—In Parliament, Men connected with Ariſtocracy, but in a noble independent way, ſtood forward with a zeal for Liberty which I believe to be genuine, and at that moment ſuperior to every perſonal conſideration: they avowed their exultation with the People here, at the eſtabliſhment of Liberty in France; demonſtrated the inconſiſtence of their ancient Colleague, and refuted the pernicious doctrine which he vainly endeavoured

to

to maintain. Out of Parliament, a ſucceſſion of able Writers, from every part of the kingdom, and almoſt of every denomination, Churchmen, Diſſenters, Reformers, and Men who had not concurred in the meaſures of Reformation, all haſtened to defend their Common Principles of Freedom. Some of theſe Patriotic Writers were completely victorious, and overthrew the poſitions of their Antagoniſt with a very ſuperior force of reaſon and true maſculine eloquence. Not one of them was wholly unſucceſsful in the combat, and unable to prove him erroneous in any important inſtance; not one failed to produce ſome example of groſs miſinformation, reſpecting the Revolution in France, or ſome miſſtatement of facts and principles reſpecting the Revolution in England; ſome miſrepreſentation of the character and conduct of our preſent Reformers, ſome doctrine ſubverſive of General Liberty, or contradictory to the true Principles of the Engliſh Conſtitution. By theſe united efforts to ſupport the Cauſe of Freedom, the authority of our modern Filmer has been reduced to its proper level; and the impreſſion, which eloquent declamation had made in oppoſition to facts and the true theory of Government, has been gradually worn off the Public Mind. Powerful as the writings of that Gentleman have been to rouſe and inflame the malignant paſſions, they have been weak and unſucceſsful in the attempt to convince the judgment

ment of rational and diſintereſted Men; on whoſe deciſion ultimately depends the opinion of a whole Community. Already their determined diſapprobation is followed by the general ſenſe of the People, that the writings in queſtion were calculated to ſtifle the Spirit of Liberty in England, and to perpetuate thoſe groſs Parliamentary Abuſes, the neceſſary conſequence of which muſt be a CORRUPT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, which promotes the intereſt of a FEW, and injures or deſtroys the happineſs of MILLIONS! but that their actual tendency is to create that diſaffection which they have failed to prove; that riot and commotion have been their immediate effects; and that, by having rouſed the fierce ſpirit of Revolution, it is to be feared their eventual conſequence may be to deluge the land with blood.

It therefore behoves the perſons who have long oppoſed every reaſonable propoſition, to correct thoſe abuſes of the Conſtitution, under the frivolous pretence, that they are INNOVATIONS, dangerous to the Peace of the Country, to conſider, whether their continued perſeverance in this policy, may not produce the convulſions which every good Man would deplore, but which the privileged Orders in the State are more peculiarly concerned, by every juſt and prudent conceſſion to labour to avert. At preſent, it is evident, that moderate meaſures

of

of Reformation, conceded with a generous frankneſs by the Ariſtocracy would be received by the People with joy, and thankful ſatisfaction. Let the Septennial Bill be repealed, let the Repreſentation of the People be amended on the principles propoſed by Mr. Pitt, let the Right of Suffrage be granted to Copyholders, and Houſeholders of a certain claſs, with effectual Regulations to diſcourage expence and tumult at elections, and without the aid of Mr. Burke's Aſiatic eloquence to decry the NEW Conſtitutions of France and America, the adoption of ſimilar principles in England, would be for ages yet to come an impoſſible event. That this prudent reſtitution of the popular Rights would ſoon be followed by the repeal of the Teſt Laws ſeems moſt probable; and the eſtabliſhment of complete Toleration would certainly render ſome farther Reformation in the Church unavoidable. But this correction of Eccleſiaſtical Abuſes would then be conducted on the ſame principles of cautious wiſdom, and well-tempered zeal which ſtrongly recommend the plan of Political Improvements, which has been now mentioned. In that caſe Theoretical perfection would neither be attained perhaps, in our Eccleſiaſtical Inſtitutions, nor in the Form of our Political Government; but what would be practically much better would be effected; what would be more agreeable to the temper and prejudices of the Community, more ſuitable to the ſtate of morals, and the

Another Beaconsfield.

diſtribution of property in the Country would be eſtabliſhed.

By theſe temperate plans for accompliſhing a Reformation of Parliament, for amending the Forms and correcting abuſes in the Diſcipline of the Church, with the Repeal of every Intolerant Statute which would be naturally connected with thoſe beneficial meaſures, the hazard of any great and violent Revolution in this Country would be avoided. The Nation would be happy in the ſecure poſſeſſion of Liberty, and in the eſtabliſhment of a Religion completely tolerant in its Spirit, and in its forms at once rational and pious, yet calculated for the comprehenſion of good Men of many uneſſential diverſities of ſentiment. The Diſſenters of every denomination would thus be relieved and conciliated; the Biſhops would recover the confidence of the Public; and the Parochial Clergy would acquire competence and private comfort; the Nobles would retain the ſafe unenvyed poſſeſſion of their conſtitutional privileges; and the People would reſt ſatisfyed with the ſurrender of thoſe uſurpations on their Rights of Repreſentation, and Frequent Election which have ſo nearly ruined our happy Syſtem of Government. But ſhould the Nobility, who on other great Political queſtions have been uſually divided continue, combined, though with ſome ſplendid exceptions, in their oppoſition to every equitable plan of Public Reformation, their miſtaken policy may too

too probably produce the moſt pernicious conſequences. Men robbed or cheated of their Rights may be patient while a hope of redreſs remains by regular and pacific means; but when frequent denials of Juſtice have irritated, and driven them into deſperate Councils, they ſeldom will ſtop at the mere recovery of their Rights. The People may commence their ſtruggle on firm ground in defence of their ancient and undoubted Liberties; but in the heat and fury of the conflict, they may too probably be led far to exceed thoſe limits. In ſuch unhappy conteſts, they naturally wiſh to diſable their antagoniſts, they too often ruſh on to retaliation and revenge. This was the unfortunate conſequence of commotion in a former reign; hardſhip and calamity to the Many, with the deſtruction of the moſt reſpectable Orders in the State, were then the effect of a Civil War, which was provoked by the oppreſſive Government of Charles the Firſt, and in which the People originally engaged with a view not to deſtroy but to protect and preſerve the Conſtitution.

In the actual ſituation of the Country at this juncture, the dread of inſurrection, as a nearly approaching calamity, is ſurely a groundleſs apprehenſion. No concerted deſign to recover the loſt Rights of the People by force, and to retaliate on the ruling Claſſes can be thought poſſible at preſent; it muſt be allowed to be a viſionary or an affected fear. The Spirit of Revolution

has been conjured up, indeed, by one who knows not how to lay it; but it ſtalks through the land, preſenting a fearful and portentous appearance, gazed at and ſhunned by the general maſs of the People. At this moment, the ſtate of the nation, reſpecting its Commerce and Public Revenue, is proſperous beyond its expectations, or its hopes; general ſatisfaction is the apparent conſequence, and for ſome time that ſatisfaction may countervail in the Public Mind, the ſenſe of danger to the Liberty of the Community. But let not this flow of unexpected proſperity lull our hereditary Rulers into a falſe ſecurity, which may be fatal to them and to the nation. To be ſafe, they muſt be juſt; and to preſerve their Conſtitutional Privileges, they muſt conſent to part with that power which they have gained in defiance of Law and the Conſtitution. The grievances complained of are great and undeniable; they are felt as evils; they are reſented as injuries; and ſilent as the Collective Body of the People now are, and apparently to vulgar eyes neither very generally nor very anxiouſly ſolicitous for redreſs, yet the time may come, much ſooner, perhaps, than many may imagine, when their reſentment will be found truly formidable.

Before the debt of the Public can be much reduced, and the load of thoſe taxes which bear hardeſt on the bulk of the Community can be taken off, in any conſiderable degree, a great European War may break out upon us; or in the

the courſe of our ſtruggle to depreſs or dethrone the Sultan of Myſore, our Oriental Allies may deſert us; diſaſters may attend our Armies, the Carnatic may be loſt, and Peace on any tolerable terms may be unattainable. At Home, and in Ireland, many conceivable events, to which a more direct alluſion would be improper, may contribute to increaſe the danger and aggravate the diſcontent of the Nation. By misfortunes like theſe the ſunſhine of our preſent ſituation may be gradually, or ſuddenly clouded over; and a ſtormy ſeaſon may ſucceed, in which the mild voice of moderation could not be heard. Aſtoniſhed by the fall of our national grandeur, impoveriſhed by the loſs of credit, commerce, and landed rents, oppreſſed by an enormous load of taxes, and exaſperated by the long-continued injuſtice of the ſuperior powers, the Engliſh People would probably then renew, but in a louder tone, thoſe expoſtulations with which the ear of Parliament has been ſo lately ſtunned; higher terms of Reformation, though ſtill within the verge of the Conſtitution, would be expected; the reſtitution of our ancient Rights of Annual Parliaments and Univerſal Suffrage would be demanded; and ſhould thoſe claims be refuſed by the Legiſlature, the diſcontent of the Public would be ten fold increaſed.—Impatient from diſtreſs, enraged by this laſt injurious refuſal of their Right, and urged on by the examples of France and America, the People would

would begin to extend their views of Reformation beyond the bounds of the Conſtitution; they would become leſs fearful of trying new and hazardous ſchemes of policy; the principles of the National Aſſembly, or of the American State, would gradually become the principles of a majority of the People of England; and thus the perſevering injuſtice of the Ariſtocracy would at laſt produce, in the Community, that diſaffection to the Conſtitution, which, without falſehood and calumny, cannot now be imputed to a few Individuals. Again the moſt reſpectable Orders in the State would be attacked by the People; again the abolition of the Upper Houſe of Parliament would be effected; and the Throne itſelf would be again ſhaken or overturned: and after infinite hazards and calamities, perhaps, a NEW Republic, the beneficial effects of which may well be doubted, would be eſtabliſhed on the ruins of the Conſtitution; in which no eſſential change is now meditated by the Popular Party; or could be approved by wiſe and diſpaſſionate Men. But the influence and credit which ſuch perſons may now poſſeſs with the People, at that criſis would be loſt; their pacific counſels would be over-ruled by the eagerneſs of impetuous Men, better ſuited to the violence of that tempeſtuous ſeaſon; their intreaties to reſpect the privileges of the Nobles, or the juſt Prerogative of the Crown, would then be ſlighted by the People, as their ſolicitations to reſtore the Rights

Rights of the People have hitherto been diſregarded by the Nobles and the Crown.

Such, it is to be feared, would be the progreſs of our national diſſentions, if an equitable Reſtoration of Popular Rights be ſtill delayed or denied; and thus, perhaps, a ſcene of confuſion would be commenced, the miſchiefs of which no power of numbers could calculate, and no human wiſdom could then prevent. For the preſervation of general peace and harmony, from a juſt regard for rational Liberty and the happineſs of the Community, it is devoutly to be wiſhed, that juſtice may be conceded before the hour ſhall arrive, when fierce contention to recover the Rights of the Nation ſhall be unavoidable. Inſtead of hazarding their dignified privileges and great conſtitutional powers to preſerve their encroachments on the Rights of Election, prudence and their intereſt, juſtly conſidered, ſeem to recommend to our great Patrician Families and to the Crown to ſecure thoſe powers and privileges, and the Conſtitution itſelf, by yielding a power unwarrantably gained, before the national reſentment be completely rouſed, and moderate conceſſions no longer would be accepted with the grateful approbation of the Public. To our hereditary Rulers and to the Community, there is much danger in the counſels of wild and enthuſiaſtic Men, whoſe writings, however oppoſite they may be in their principles and their immediate aim, have the

ſame

ſame ultimate tendency, by exciting extravagant demands on the one hand, and ſuffering no conceſſion on the other, to provoke diſcord and national confuſion. In the peculiar circumſtances of this Country, it is evident, that the conſequence of thoſe counſels may be in the higheſt degree calamitous. But by the patience and moderation of the People, and the juſtice and public ſpirit of the Nobles, and confidential Adviſers of the Crown, general harmony, on the principles of a fair and equitable accommodation, may yet be ſecured, and the impending danger may be averted.

That the ſuggeſtions of prudence, and the ſtill higher conſiderations of juſtice and benevolence, may avail to prevent the miſeries of a Civil War, every good man muſt deeply imprecate. But ſhould other counſels unfortunately prevail, ſhould the Nobles, whether in oppoſition to the Crown, or in its confidence, continue inſeparably united to ſupport the preſent depraved ſtate of the Legiſlature; ſhould the Nation be finally provoked to ſeek redreſs from Commotion and a Revolution effected by force, in that unhappy event, which none would more ſinſicerely deplore than they who have long been the Advocates of a temperate Reformation, thoſe perſons will at leaſt enjoy the conſcious ſatisfaction of having laboured to prevent confuſion, not by quenching the ſpirit of Liberty, not by ſanctifying abuſe and uſurpation, with every

conſequent

conſequent corruption, but by pointing the zeal of their Fellow-Citizens to its proper and neceſſary object, to the attainment of a juſt and moderate correction of great Parliamentary Grievances, by thoſe orderly and legal means which our impaired Conſtitution ſtill affords. At that calamitous period, popular rage may be the inſtrument of ruin; but the true cauſe of the public miſery will be found in the pride, ambition, and ſelfiſh policy of our hereditary Rulers; and that obſtinacy, which refuſed to ſurrender the ſmalleſt particle of its uſurped power, will be condemned by an impartial poſterity, more than the violence of that national reſentment which puniſhed uſurpation with extreme ſeverity.

APPENDIX

TO THE

DEFENCE of Dr. PRICE.

ADVERTISEMENT reſpecting the PAPERS contained in the APPENDIX.

THE Firſt Paper in this Appendix, contains a Petition to Parliament from the County of Cambridge, in the year 1780, for the redreſs of grievances then univerſally felt and complained of. The Meeting was called by the Yeomen of the County: They formed a great majority of the Meeting, and they conſiſted chiefly of Diſſenters from the Church of England. And yet a Petition, avowing an explicit preference of the Conſtitution of England, was adopted (with only one diſſentient voice) by a Meeting ſo compoſed, in a ſeaſon of great diſtreſs and general diſcontent under the conduct of Government.

The

The Second Paper contains a Petition to Parliament from the County of Kent, in the year 1782, which was afterwards adopted, with no material variation, by the Counties of York, Cornwall, Eſſex, &c.—In each of theſe Counties there are many Diſſenters; in Yorkſhire and Eſſex they are very numerous, and they ſigned, with zeal, a Petition which complained of the groſs inequality of the Repreſentation of the People in Parliament, and yet at the ſame time expreſſed their moſt ardent wiſh, that the excellent Conſtitution, under which they had the happineſs to live, might be maintained on the principles on which it is founded. In Yorkſhire alone, it is probable that this Petition was ſigned by not leſs than two thouſand Diſſenters, who were alſo Freeholders of that County.

Paper III. contains Reſolutions by the Conſtitutional Society at Nottingham, in the year 1780. In that Town, Diſſenters are more numerous, in proportion to Churchmen, than in almoſt any other place in the kingdom; they were, I believe, a great majority of the Conſtitutional Society by which theſe Reſolutions were adopted. In theſe Reſolutions, the Society declare their adherence to the popular doctrine of equal Repreſentation and annual Parliaments with great force and energy; but the moſt ingenious malice may be defied to point out any paſſage in this Paper, which marks the leaſt diſaffection to the Conſtitution: on the contrary, the Aſſociation here

complain that the ancient uſage of Parliament has been departed from; and declare, that to recover Parliament to its conſtitutional character is the object of their purſuit; but if the Reform, expreſſed in their Reſolves, in all its extent ſhould be found impracticable, they will thankfully receive ſo much of it as can be procured.

Paper IV. contains a Declaration of the Principles of the Conſtitutional Society at Cambridge, which was formed in the year 1783; and of which the Members were chiefly Inhabitants of that Town, and Diſſenters of various denominations. In that Declaration, expreſſions may be found which indiſputably prove the attachment of that Society to the mixed Form of Government, eſtabliſhed in this Country; the principles of which are there recognized as the fundamental principles of the Cambridge Aſſociation.

Paper I.

Petition *to* Parliament *from the* County *of* Cambridge, *in the* year 1780.

The Petition *of the* Gentlemen, Clergy, *and* Freeholders *of the* County *of* Cambridge,

To the Honourable the Commons of Great-Britain in Parliament aſſembled,

Sheweth,

THAT your Petitioners do thus publicly declare their entire and zealous approbation of the Legiſlature of this Country, as placed in the free and independent concurrence of King, Lords, and Commons, in preference to every other mode of Civil Government.

That they anxiouſly wiſh the bleſſing of this Form of Legiſlation to be continued to their lateſt poſterity in its Conſtitutional purity.

That they ſeriouſly apprehend this Form of Legiſlation will be eſſentially vitiated, if not virtually changed, whenever the treaſure and offices of the Community ſhall be ſucceſsfully employed to bring the Repreſentatives of the People under the influence of the Executive Power.

That they conceive a ſtrong tendency to this change, is at preſent, and has formerly been, too notorious to admit of doubt, or to require proof.

That

That they conſider every ſyſtem of Public Adminiſtration, carried on by means of Parliamentary corruption, however ſanctified by time, precedent, or authority, to be abſolutely unjuſtifiable on every principle of good ſenſe and ſound policy—to be as diſhonourable to the upright intentions of the Crown, as it is burthenſome to the property, and dangerous to the Liberties, of the People.

Your Petitioners do, therefore, moſt ſolemnly apply themſelves to the Honour, the Juſtice, the Integrity, of this Honourable Houſe, praying that effectual meaſures may be taken by this Houſe, to inquire into, and correct, any groſs abuſes in the expenditure of Public money, to reduce all exorbitant emoluments of office, to reſcind and aboliſh all ſinecure places and unmerited penſions, and to uſe all ſuch other Conſtitutional means as may tend to eſtabliſh the independence of Parliament on the moſt laſting foundations.

And your Petitioners are the more earneſt in this their prayer, becauſe they are of opinion, that no other expedient can equally tend to heal our domeſtic diviſions, to unite the whole Nation in the warmeſt ſupport of his Majeſty's Perſon and Government, againſt the unprovoked hoſtilities of the Houſe of Bourbon, and to put a final period to that primary ſource of National diſtreſs—the American War.

Paper II.

Paper II.

Petition *to* Parliament *from the* County *of* Kent, *in the* year 1782.

The Humble Petition of the Noblemen, Gentlemen, Clergy, and Freeholders of the County of Kent,

Sheweth,

THAT your Petitioners, ſenſible of the excellency of that Conſtitution under which they have the happineſs to live, moſt ardently wiſh to have it maintained upon the true principles on which it is founded.

Your Petitioners further ſhew, That it is neceſſary to the welfare of the People, that the Commons' Houſe of Parliament ſhould have a common intereſt with the nation; and that in the preſent ſtate of the Repreſentation of the People in Parliament, the Houſe of Commons do not ſufficiently ſpeak the voice of the People.

Your Petitioners therefore humbly pray this Honourable Houſe to take into their moſt ſerious conſideration, the preſent inadequate ſtate of the Repreſentation of the People in Parliament, and to apply ſuch remedy to this great Conſtitutional Evil, as to this Honourable Houſe may ſeem meet.

And your Petitioners ſhall ever pray, &c.

Paper III.

Reſolutions *by the* Conſtitutional Society *at* Nottingham, *in the* year 1780.

At a full Meeting, the following Reſolutions were unanimouſly paſſed, viz.

THAT an equal Repreſentation is the Right of the People, and eſſential to the very idea of a Repreſentative Body.

That annual Parliaments are the old conſtitutional uſage of Parliament, the true law of the land, and the beſt ſecurity which can be furniſhed for the virtuous conduct of Parliament, and for its Independence on every power whatſoever, unleſs that of the People alone.

That the preſent inequalities in the Repreſentation of the People, and the continuance of Parliaments beyond a ſingle Seſſion, are altogether a departure from, and a corruption of, the uſage and law of Parliament.

That to recover Parliament to its conſtitutional character, by a more equal Repreſentation, and the return of annual Parliaments, is no romantic object, but worthy of a free People to demand,

as

as it is within their power to obtain, and is alone adequate to their wiſhes.

That the holding any Place, Penſion, or Contract, at the diſpoſal of the Crown, (unleſs, perhaps, in ſome few inſtances, which may be expedient for the Public buſineſs, and not dangerous to the Public ſafety) is abſolutely incompatible with a ſeat in the Houſe of Commons.

That it is unworthy of the People of England, in their preſent ſtate of diſcontent and alarm, to deſiſt from that vigorous but legal proſecution of the Reform contained in the preceding reſolves; and that every thing which is eſſentially ſhort of this, is but a mere temporary expedient, not affording even the promiſe of a permanent good to theſe Kingdoms.

That no Candidate to Repreſent the Town of Nottingham, or any County, Town, or Borough, whatever, in Parliament, who does not adopt the ſentiments, and pledge himſelf by the honour of a Man and of a Briton, for the recovery of the Rights of the People, as expreſſed by the preceding Reſolves, (or ſo much of them as can be obtained) deſerves, or ſhall receive, our Vote or Intereſt in any application for a Seat in Parliament.

That the above are our firm Reſolves; we adopt the Reform expreſſed therein in all its extent: but if, in all its extent, it ſhould be impracticable, we will thankfully receive ſo much of it as can be procured, and join our Fellow-Citizens in the purſuit of any part of ſo deſirable an object.

That the thanks of this Society be conveyed to Major Cartwright, for his judicious and manly conduct in every thing which affects the Liberties of the People; and that this Society will be happy to give him every expreſſion of their eſteem and gratitude which ſhall be in their power.

S. HAYWOOD, Secretary.

Paper IV.

* Principles *and* Reſolutions *of the* Conſtitutional Society *at* Cambridge, *in the* year 1783.

We declare,

1. THAT, in our opinion, every individual of Mankind is born with a natural right to Life, Liberty, and Property.

2. That the aſſociating of many individuals into one Collective Body, is for the ſecurity, and not for the ſuppreſſion of Natural Rights.

3. That the conſent of the People is the true origin, and the happineſs of all, the only worthy end of Civil Government.

4. That there is in all States impliedly, and in the Britiſh State expreſsly, a mutual contract between the governors and the governed.

5. That

* Extracted from the Minute Book of the Society.

5. That, in the Britiſh State, the contracting Parties have agreed not to invade each other's Rights.

6. That one Right of the People of Great-Britain is, to make laws for their own Government.

7. That our Anceſtors, in very remote times, uſed to make their own laws, and elect their own officers; and that in later times every free Man voted for Repreſentatives in Parliament, for it was only in the Reign of Henry the Sixth that voting was reſtrained to Freeholders of forty ſhillings a year.

8. That the preſent ſtate of Parliamentary Repreſentation is extremely defective, and ought to be Reformed.

9. That the Britiſh Conſtitution of King, Lords, and Commons, is the moſt perfect theory of Government in the world, and may be rendered as perfect in practice, if the Houſe of Commons be ſo Reformed as to be independent on, and uninfluenced by, the other two branches of the Legiſlature.

10. That the Houſe of Commons hath been manifeſtly under an improper influence from the other two branches of Legiſlature, from which innumerable evils have ariſen to the Country at large, as well as to the influencing parties themſelves; and that unleſs ſome wiſe and effectual meaſures be ſpeedily taken to reſtore the Independence of that Houſe, by reforming the Repreſentation, the Country muſt be overwhelmed in ruin.

Unanimous

Unanimous in theſe opinions, we declare, that the end we propoſe to obtain is a PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

The whole Houſe of Parliament conſiſts of King, Lords, and Commons; but our attention is wholly confined to the laſt, they being the Repreſentatives of us.

In order to obtain, as far as lies in us, this deſirable end,

We reſolve,

That we will, by ſuch peaceable and conſtitutional Meaſures as ſhall appear to us beſt calculated to anſwer the end, endeavour to obtain a Reform in the Repreſentation.

That at all future elections for this County, we will uſe our endeavours to promote the intereſt of only ſuch Candidates as ſhall appear to us moſt likely to procure a more equal Repreſentation in Parliament, and a ſhortening of its duration.

That we will put the Candidate whom we ſupport to no expence, but will diſcharge all the expences that may attend our voting, &c. &c. &c.

THE END.